

**An investigation of affect responses drawn from South African
tertiary level visual communication students by means of
illustrating the corporeal feminine through comic book art.**

by
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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Sequential narratives, generally referred to as *comics*, which directly address the nature of the female body and its flows, have both been censured and praised. These comics have resulted in *affecting* their readers in different ways, leading to feelings of excitement, interest, repulsion or even intense anger. The intention of this research was to investigate the way in which corporeal feminism may generate affect responses through the comic book, *Shapes of flow*.

The case of corporeal feminism has been seen by feminists from both a positive and a negative perspective, depending on whether feminists view biological sex as an empowering or marginalising force. Many aspects of this topic are viewed as taboo subjects in a socio-cultural environment, which has further strengthened the hesitation to theorise the female body. Affect theory ties well into this debate, as it can be employed as a tool to investigate human reactions toward disputed topics. The theoretical themes that were analysed also included *difference* feminism and South African feminism. Elizabeth Grosz (1994:xi) suggested the image of a Mobius strip to approach ‘dualist pairs’ that are believed to result in essentialism and marginalisation, such as sex/gender and self/other. The Mobius strip concept has potential to bridge these gaps. Another powerful feminist theory that emerged from the research, is Bracha Ettinger’s *matrixial borderspace* (Ettinger 2006:220).

A case study was employed to collect qualitative data from eleven tertiary level students, who study Visual Communication at a design institution in the Western Cape region. A naturalistic research paradigm was utilised to collect qualitative data by means of semi-structured interviews, field observations and a group discussion. An interpretive and inductive approach was employed to analyse the collected data.

The study found that there still seems to be discomfort amongst both men and women to discuss the body and issues relating to it. The discomfort was especially significant in response to matters concerning menstruation. Several of the participants recalled personal experiences in which they felt ashamed or embarrassed as a result of the natural functions of their bodies. Similarly, the corporeal feminine has been suppressed and silenced in discourse for a long time, even in feminist discussions. The comic that was presented to the participants was able to introduce silenced ‘taboo’ topics into everyday discussions. In addition, affect is formed within a cultural framework. This means that affect can be utilised to enforce dominant power regimes, but it can also be used to dismantle them.

OPSOMMING

Opeenvolgende narratiewe, ook bekend as strokiesprente, wat direk die natuur van die vroulike liggaam en die vloeiing wat daarmee gepaard gaan aanspreek, is al beide gekritiseer en aangeprys. Hierdie strokiesprente het lesers op verskeie maniere *geaffekteer*, wat gelei het tot gevoelens van opgewondenheid, belangstelling, walging en selfs intensiewe woede. Die doel van hierdie navorsingsprojek was om ondersoek in te stel na die wyse waarop liggaamlike feminisme in die strokiesverhaal, *Shapes of flow*, affek-reaksies kan voortbring.

Feministe beskou liggaamlike feminisme uit beide 'n positiewe en negatiewe perspektief, afhangende daarvan of die feministe biologiese geslag as maggewend of verswakkend beskou. Verskeie aspekte van hierdie onderwerp word as taboe beskou in 'n sosiokulturele omgewing. Hierdie siening het veroorsaak dat daar steeds aarseling is om oor die vroulike liggaam te teoretiseer. Affek-teorie sluit goed aan by hierdie debat, aangesien dit aangewend kan word as 'n instrument om menslike reaksies teenoor ongemaklike onderwerpe te ondersoek. Die teoretiese temas wat ontleed is, sluit *verskil*-feminisme en Suid-Afrikaanse feminisme in. Elizabeth Grosz (1994:*xii*) het voorgestel dat die konsep van 'n Mobius-strook gebruik kan word om tweevoudige pare (byvoorbeeld seks/geslag en self/ander) te benader. Daar word geglo dat sodanige pare kan lei tot essensialisme en diskriminasie. Die konsep van die Mobius-strook het die potensiaal om hierdie gapings te oorbrug. Nog 'n belangrike feministiese teorie wat uit die ondersoek na vore gekom het, is Bracha Ettinger se *matriksgrensruiimte* (Ettinger 2006:220).

'n Gevallestudie is aangewend om kwalitatiewe data te versamel. Die deelnemers het bestaan uit elf universiteitsvlak-studente wat Visuele Kommunikasie studeer by 'n instituut van ontwerp in die Weskaap. 'n Naturalistiese navorsingsparadigma is gebruik om die data in te samel deur middel van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude, veldwaarneming en groepbesprekings. 'n Interpretatiewe en induktiewe benadering is aangewend om die data te ontleed.

Die studie het ontdek dat daar nog ongemak onder mans sowel as vrouens bestaan om die liggaam en kwessies wat daarmee verband hou, te bespreek. Die ongemak was veral opmerkbaar toe sake rakende menstruasie bespreek is. 'n Paar van die deelnemers het persoonlike ervarings onthou waartydens hulle skaam en verleë gevoel het as gevolg van die natuurlike funksies van hulle liggame. Die onderwerp van die vroulike liggaam word al lank in diskoers onderdruk en verswyg - selfs in feministiese debatte. Die strokiesverhaal wat aan die deelnemers voorgelê is, het bespreking van die taboe-onderwerpe gestimuleer. Affek word in 'n kulturele raamwerk gevorm, wat beteken dat dit gebruik kan word om dominante magsregimes te versterk. In teenstelling hiermee kan affek egter ook gebruik word om sulke regimes te vernietig.

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1. Orientation to the study

1.1. Introduction to the research

During my experience of studying Illustration, I developed a keen interest in the art of sequential narrative, or as it is more commonly termed, comics. However, when I sought visual inspiration from well-known comics, I was often disappointed by the lack of empowered female representation within these (usually Western) artworks (Sabin, 1993:221-224). And so, it was decided that further investigation would be needed. After a rather lengthy period of searching, I discovered feminist comics from the 'second wave', such as the work of Aline Kominsky-Crumb. These comics, featuring female bodies in all their corporeal glory, often left me with a variety of lingering emotions. These feelings of mental and emotional disruption ranged from absolute shock and embarrassment, to amusement and, at other times, to feelings of empowered joy. Needless to say, I was *affected*. In essence, it is this concept of affect, as it relates to the corporeal feminine, that I aimed to explore throughout this thesis.

1.2. Background

By placing corporeal feminism in a South African context, the intention of this qualitative case study was to investigate the way in which corporeal feminism may generate affect responses through comic book art.

Corporeal feminism is a branch of the broad feminist movement, in which the symbolism and representation of the sexed body, specifically from the perspective of the biological female, is placed under scrutiny (Bray & Colebrook 1998:5). Corporeal feminism is often linked to difference feminism, a theory in which it is believed that the differences between individuals (e.g. sex, gender, race and culture) have an impact on the way in which individuals experience their lived realities (Davis 1997:9). The case of the 'biological female' body has been seen by feminists from both a positive and a negative perspective, depending on whether feminists choose to view 'difference' as an empowering or marginalising force. Affect theory therefore ties well into this debate, as it can be employed as a tool to investigate human reactions toward debated topics. In the case of the corporeal feminist comic book, the reactions of viewers may range from intensely negative to intensely positive, or in the description of affect theory, as either impelling or repelling corporeal engagements (Best 2002:210). The stronger the 'affect' on the reader, the more likely it is that the book has served as a tool for disruption.

Key writers that provided both inspiration and reference regarding the topic of feminism were Kathy Davis and Elizabeth Grosz. In terms of affect theory, the writers

Elsbeth Probyn, Michalinos Zembylas, Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg proved to be insightful sources.

The medium of visual art expression that was utilised as a tool for data collection during my research was comics. According to the leading writer in this field, Scott McCloud (1994:9), comics can be defined as "Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer". I chose to make use of a comic book, instead of a graphic novel, for this study. It is important to note that, although both of these formats make use of sequential narrative as their medium to portray images, the two belong to somewhat different categories. This difference is merely linked to the format in which they are created and read. Graphic novels take the format of a novel, in which the story begins and ends within one or two novel-length books. Comic books tell a story across the span of several issues, and sometimes continue the story for several years. Each issue can either tell a different story involving the same world or characters, or a comic book story can last for the duration of all the issues combined. (Knowledge Nuts 2014). As this study was limited by time, it was not possible to create a full graphic novel. Furthermore, the time available to allow participants to interact with the book, as well as complete the interview, did not allow for the use of a graphic novel.

Furthermore, this investigation took place within the context of South Africa, which means that the feminist perspective incorporated within this research was influenced by this environment. South African feminism is still a relatively new discourse, which is developing within a post-colonial socio-political context. According to Amanda Gouws (2012:527), the late development of South African feminism is predominantly a result of the oppressive Apartheid regime, during which time the main focus of protest was geared towards resisting racial inequality rather than the inequality of gender. The fight for gender equality started off enthusiastically in the late nineteenth century with the establishment of the Women's National Coalition; however, this enthusiasm was lost in the years that followed as a result of gender mainstreaming¹, and confusion regarding the meaning of feminism in South Africa (Swart 2005:1-3). Scholars critique feminism in South Africa for being driven by Western scholarship, which has generally favoured the perspectives of white women and cannot be applied successfully to the wider South African socio-political and cultural landscape (Frenkel 2009:3). Gouws (2010:14) indicates that, for South African feminism to succeed, a 'politics of difference' is required. Despite these issues regarding South African feminism, the practice and theorising thereof is still actively developing. The *Agenda* journals, generated by Agenda Feminist Media since 1987 (Agenda Feminist Media

¹ Applied correctly, gender mainstreaming aims to critically examine and constantly reinvent the formation and application of policies in problematic areas, so that gender inequalities can be solved. Instead, gender mainstreaming (or 'menstreaming', according to Bhana and Mthethwa-Sommers (2010:3)) in South Africa has resulted in silencing activism of women in power positions, such as women working amongst the highly patriarchal power structures of the state. It also disregards the differences between the lived realities experienced by South African women, which causes inefficiency in dealing with gender issues (Gouws 2010:16-17; Swart 2005:3).

2018) are a highly influential South African feminist perspective, and these journals have served as an insightful source throughout my research. In addition, a well-known South African artist from Cape Town, Lady Skollie, creates her work on the subject of the South African female body, and has served as inspiration for the artwork created for this study. She makes use of metaphor through objects such as bananas and papayas to symbolise penises and vaginas, which are applied to critique the abuse and misuse of the female body in South African society. Her artwork voices issues that have become taboo topics in this cultural space (Sesay 2018).

1.3. Problem statement

This study focusses on exploring the representation of the female body through comic book art, and, through the use of qualitative case study methodology, investigating affective responses that are generated from this representation. By representing the symbolic biological form of the woman, the aim is to celebrate the way in which the 'body symbolic' can rupture patriarchal power structure and, thus, to take a feminist stance. By gaining affective responses as a result of this artwork, one can question how this artwork does indeed serve the intended feminist purpose of celebration and disruption.

1.3.1. Research questions

Based on my theoretical standpoints and problem statement, I was able to formulate a single-minded research question: How can feminist portrayals of the corporeal feminine in comic book art generate affective responses from Visual Communication students in the Western Cape higher education context?

Secondary research questions were also drawn from the problem statement: How is the concept of representing the female body viewed by various feminist perspectives, especially in South Africa? How are affects of power/ empowerment and/ or weakness/ disempowerment understood by Western Cape Illustration students who view these comics? Can difference be represented without contributing to essentialism and homogenisation and, if so, how?

1.3.2. Aims of the study

The aim of this investigation is to formulate an understanding of how corporeal feminism can be communicated through comic book art, and through this artwork, produce affect responses that can contribute towards gaining a better understanding

of how corporeal feminism may be perceived by the study participants as a form of female dis/empowerment.

1.3.3. Objectives of the study

The study objectives are as follows: to formulate an understanding of corporeal feminism within the South African context, which approaches difference in an inclusive manner, and to analyse whether corporeal feminism can be seen as empowering through the affect responses obtained from participants.

1.4. Overview of the research methodology

This study made use of a qualitative case study research design. Qualitative case studies are highly beneficial when the aim is to collect socially, politically and culturally specific data in natural settings. Qualitative case studies view each participant's opinion and construction of reality as valid (Simons 2012:6-7). An interpretive research paradigm informed the methodology of the study. Furthermore, the participants in this study were both male and female, and their ages ranged between eighteen to twenty-five years of age. They were all Visual Communication students majoring in Illustration, and were in the process of completing their first year of tertiary education in the Western Cape region. The data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews, a group discussion and field notes procured through observations. As the researcher was highly involved in the collection process of qualitative research (Simons 2012:128), personal reflections that were experienced throughout the research process were also included, which contributed to the data. For the data analysis process, an inductive and interpretive method was employed. This allowed for meaningful 'clusters' to appear, from which themes were identified for discussion (Krane *et al.* 2001:27). To ensure the protection of all the participants, as well as the institution involved, careful ethical considerations were put into place. This entailed obtaining consent² from the participants prior to data collection, informing them of all the necessary details of the investigation as well as their participant rights, and it further required the discretion of myself as the researcher to interpret their data with credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Guba 1981:83-87).

1.5. Boundaries and limitations of the study

As the research contained within this document takes the form of a case study, which is formulated within a very specific, socio-cultural context, the conclusions drawn here are not generalisable or necessarily directly applicable on a global scale (Njie &

² See *Addendum A* on pages 65-69.

Asimiran 2014:36). For this reason, it is important to consider this study as bounded in space and time. Furthermore, my positioning as a white, hetero-sexual, Afrikaans, Namibian woman portends certain biases that cause boundaries in my understanding towards the circumstances of women who do not fall within the same categories as myself. For this reason, the interpretation of the data in this study is also limited to a singular, context-bound perspective. Being from Namibia, I approach the South African theoretical landscape from an outside perspective, which may create gaps within the knowledge that I possess regarding the social, cultural and political practices of this space. Additionally, although Chapter Two (Theoretical Perspectives) acknowledges the existence of a variety of *feminisms*, the focus of this study has been narrowed down to specifically investigate corporeal feminism, placed within a South African context. This study therefore does not speak for a broad case of feminism, but rather aims to add knowledge within a specific setting, bound within time and place. The study was funded by myself as a student researcher, which placed constraints on the amount of funds that could be provided to aid the investigation. Lastly, all the research was completed within a time period of six months as per the Stellenbosch University curriculum, which means that, while there is still potential to conduct more extensive research, time did not allow for this.

1.6. Structure of the thesis

This case study is structured as follows:

Chapter one (Orientation to the study) provides an introduction to the research that took place. This chapter provides some background to the study, identifies the research question(s) and the problem statement to guide the research, and indicates that there are limitations to the study.

Chapter two (Theoretical Perspectives) contains detailed examinations of the main theoretical themes that will be weaved into the case study.

Chapter three (Methodology) comprises of the research approach and paradigm, an explanation as to how the research samples were selected, important ethical considerations that were put in place during and after the completion of the investigation, and the method utilised to analyse the raw data collected during interviews, focus group discussions and observations.

Chapter four (Data and discussion) presents an analysis and a discussion of the findings that were collected during the case study.

Chapter 5 (Conclusions and implications) brings the investigation to a close, by drawing concluding remarks from the analysis and the discussion of the data.

2. Theoretical Perspectives

2.1. Introduction

Feminism is an important form of resistance towards the patriarchal norms of Western society. Feminism in its fight for gender parity has, through the years, manifested in many different shapes and forms. In this chapter, I wish to look specifically at corporeal feminism, one of these many forms of feminism that concerns itself specifically with studying the workings of and perceptions towards the so called 'female body'. Thus, as the first section of this chapter, corporeal feminism will be carefully unravelled and defined. Corporeal feminism has found itself moving into spaces of various genres, including art, photography and film. It is the presence of this theory within comic book art that is of particular interest in this case study.

Comics that directly and unashamedly address the nature of the female body have been both critiqued negatively as well as praised. Thus, these comics have resulted in *affecting* their readers in different ways, leading to feelings of excitement, interest, repulsion or even intense anger. Consequently, the theory of affect will be investigated as the second section of this chapter. The theoretical structure of this study is utilised with an informative purpose, to allow for a more effective understanding of how the research conducted during this time is positioned within the broader perspective of feminism, but also on a more specified scale, from the perspective of South African feminism.

2.2. Feminism Background

The topic of feminism has become somewhat challenging to define, as so many opinions from across the globe have developed through the years. This has resulted in the formation of multiple *feminisms*. As a broad definition, Kathy Davis (1997:10) believes that feminists regard power as being divided between male dominance and female inferiority, which takes place within the hierarchies of a patriarchal society. Feminists have investigated the ways in which the bodies of women have been oppressed through regulation, colonisation, mutilation and violation. Male power is believed to operate through the use of the female body as object. Thus, the ultimate aim of feminism is to create spaces of collective resistance to male dominance.

This section will provide a brief background to feminism, by looking at how feminism has developed in waves, as well as the way in which feminism is situated within South Africa. This will allow for a better understanding of where my research was positioned within the spectrum of 'feminisms'.

2.2.1. Feminism in waves

Feminism can be roughly divided into four main, fluid categories that define its history: the first wave, the second wave, the third wave and the newly established, somewhat debated fourth wave. I emphasise that these categories are often seen as fluid, as some feminist perspectives have at times overlapped within the categories, belonging neither to one nor the other.

The first wave of feminism manifested itself in the mid-nineteenth century and lasted approximately until the beginning of the twentieth century (Baumgardner 2011:2). It was brought about by the early suffragette movement that originated during the eighteen-fifties (Maclaran 2015:1733), in which women fought for citizenship rights, such as the right to vote, to receive education, to divorce and to retain custody of their children (Baumgardner 2011:2).

Feminism transformed into a new perspective during the nineteen-sixties. Lasting until the late nineteen-eighties, this time period comprised the second feminist wave, and consisted of many radical feminist movements. The second wave was born from the Civil Rights movement, when protests occurred to fight for the rights of black Americans. Feminists during this time realised they did not possess many of the rights that they were fighting for in the Civil Rights movement, and therefore turned their attention specifically to procuring these rights for all women, with a particular focus on women's equality within the household and the workplace. They also fought for the rights of sexual freedom (Baumgardner 2011:3; Kimble Wrye 2009:185). An important phrase that emerged from this time period, which is often still encountered today, is 'the personal is political'. Second wave feminists treated all women as a homogeneous group (with the white heterosexual woman as its ideal), which resulted in the censure that the second wave reinforced racism and classism (Munro 2013:23).

Thus, the third wave emerged, taking place in the time period of the late nineteen-eighties until the early two thousands. A particularly significant feminist perspective emerged in the book, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* by bell hooks (1981), in which she denounced the homogeneity of the second wave. The third wave advocated that there were multiple feminisms and recognised that systems of oppression such as race, ethnicity, class, gender and ability were intricately interwoven and should be considered within feminist analysis. Another highly influential voice that arose from this era was that of Judith Butler, who in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990) introduced Queer Theory into feminist scholarship and established the notion that gender is a performance, not biologically fixed (Maclaran 2015:1733). This wave also believed in emphasising the body as a platform for expression, included postcolonial theory and disability activism, and celebrated sex positivity (Kimble Wrye 2009:185). As a result of all the various perspectives included within this wave, this era has been criticised for focussing too much on micro-politics and individual emancipation rather than the bigger picture.

With the emergence of the freedom provided by virtual communities on the Internet, it is believed by some feminists that a fourth feminist wave has recently emerged, starting around the year of 2010. This is however, a disputed notion, as some theorists believe that the addition of a virtual debate platform is not enough to delineate a new wave. Nevertheless, the Internet has created amongst feminists a 'call-out' culture, in which events, activities or persons, either online or offline, can be 'called-out' and challenged by a global community (Munro 2013:23). A phrase that has been drawn from this 'fourth wave' is 'privilege checking', in which feminists are encouraged to carefully consider where their individual opinions stem from (historically, geographically and politically) before making any statements, and also to accept the existence and value of other feminist perspectives (Maclaran 2015:1735).

If I were to 'privilege check' myself as a researcher, I am situated as a white, Afrikaans, Namibian, middle-class, heterosexual woman, writing within the South African landscape. For this reason, it is important that I understand how the topic of feminism is practised within South Africa, especially as feminists who fall into a very similar descriptive category to me have been criticised for forgetting their privilege, and writing 'for' marginalised women rather than writing inclusively (Frenkel 2009:3). As a result, I decided to continue investigating South African feminism, in order to find out how feminists within this space negotiate the challenges drawn from theorising a multicultural feminist representation.

2.2.2. South African Feminism

South African feminism has been formed within a complex socio-political context, in which a history of segregation was forced upon the country through the colonialist regime, as well as the system of Apartheid. Apartheid was a political regime that was practised in South Africa from 1948 until 1994. Although Apartheid already existed informally in South Africa before 1948, it was only after this time, under the rule of the (Afrikaner) National Party, that Apartheid became an official governmental system. The Apartheid government, which favoured white members of the South African community over members of colour, had so much power that, although the white community in South Africa was in the minority in terms of population, they imposed a cultural majority on the country (Abdi 2002:19-21). As a result of Apartheid, South Africa is in many ways still divided by a variety of aspects, such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, language and the ownership of land (Enslin 2003:73). Despite an official end to Apartheid, racism still prevails in South Africa through conscious and subconscious social structures. A time period exceeding three-hundred years of immense racial segregation, has led to cultural patterns that are deeply embedded in everyday South African life. Today, it is believed that some white South Africans still make racist assumptions and conclusions about black and coloured South Africans, and that there is still a certain comfort towards the concept of living in privilege that disregards the negative implications that this has for non-white South African citizens (Ramphela

2001:12). As a result of the immense oppression of Apartheid, sites of struggle preceding South African Independence focussed mainly on overcoming racial inequality rather than on gender inequality. It was only during the Women's Movement³, run by the Women's National Coalition, that the issues of women's liberation came to the fore (Gouws 2012:527).

Apartheid has therefore left many South African women to suffer a triple-oppression: that of race, class and gender. Additionally, the question is posed as to which of the three should be regarded as being more oppressive. This is a difficult question, and one may conclude that the three should not be seen as distinct categories. All three aspects work simultaneously (although perhaps not equally for all women) to determine identity (De La Rey 1997:7). According to Ronit Frenkel (2009:3), it has been a challenge for South African feminists to overcome stereotypes and practices that pertain to racial oppression, especially as white women have been censured at times for undermining the voices of black women 'in the name of gender empowerment'. Frenkel also points out that another difficulty has been the attempt to include various traditions within a 'woman centred agenda'. This agenda should be respectful towards different South African traditions, whether they stem from struggle or are linked to indigenous customs.

In conclusion, this section has provided a broad overview of feminism and a brief summation of its history, which will allow for the feminist research perspective to be situated more easily within the global context. This section has also indicated that feminism, as it now stands, has developed immensely, and that each feminist perspective should carefully consider aspects such as race, class, gender and ability. These aspects form privileges in the lives of some women, which can lead to marginalisation within their feminist views. In the case of corporeal feminism, it should be noted that each woman experiences her body differently. This includes codes of dress, bodily customs and gender fluidity. While the scope of this thesis will not permit me to analyse all of these aspects, I will provide a section which scrutinises how gender plays a role in understandings of the corporeal feminine. Judith Butler and Claire Colebrook will serve as insightful sources on this topic.

With consideration of the points indicated above, I will now continue to the main theoretical perspective that will be utilised throughout this research, namely *corporeal feminism*. This feminist perspective finds many of its arguments positioned within the third wave of the movement.

2.3. Corporeal Feminism

This form of feminism generally examines and theorises the 'female' body, and can be defined as a "...discourse offering a radical anti-Cartesian revaluation of the material

³ This movement occurred during the nineteen-nineties (Gouws 2012:527).

conditions that undermine the articulation of the cogito, representation and the sexed body” (Bray & Colebrook 1998:5). Corporeal feminism aims to formulate an understanding of how the body is placed within a patriarchal symbolic order, which assigns the female body with representations that render it inferior.

In this section, the term ‘corporeal feminism’ will be further defined. The relationship between the body and the mind will be examined, as this bond also establishes the way in which gender and sex have been viewed. Thereafter, the concept of ‘difference’ will be scrutinised, specifically as this notion has been the cause for much debate within the feminist community. South African feminism places an emphasis on the importance of the acceptance of difference in feminist discourse, and therefore this inquiry is of significance. Lastly, I will identify three corporeal themes, which were utilised as guidelines to produce the practical section of this thesis, namely the comic book. To begin with, I wish to provide an explanation of the concept of ‘sex and gender’. It is important to understand this differentiation, as the separation of sex and gender has, through time, become an aspect that has contributed to the lack of discussion of the female body. This is owing to the concept of ‘sex’ being linked to essentialism, which is seen in feminist discourse as an element contributing to gender inequality⁴.

2.3.1. Gender and sex

Contemporary feminist gender theory is often closely linked to Judith Butler’s notion of gender as a performance. The performance of gender implies that gender is a social construction, and this clearly separates gender from sex. She states, “consider gender, for instance, as a corporeal style, an ‘act,’ as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where ‘performative’ itself carries the double-meaning of ‘dramatic’ and ‘non-referential’” (Butler 1988:521-522). Throughout human history, different social structures have been established in different parts of the world. Depending on these structures, certain taboos and ‘social sanctions’ have been formed, which Butler believes leads to different ‘historical possibilities’ being created for different people (Butler 1988:520). Gender is seen as being a fluid construction framed within cultural discourses, instead of a permanent, inherent replication of biological sex (Meyer & Borrie 2013:298). From Butler’s perspective of gender as a performance, gender is linked to the mind, while sex is linked to the body.

According to Claire Colebrook (2004:11-12), gender is seen broadly as certain categories into which humanity is divided, the most socially fixed being male and female. This allows for the same ‘substance’, that being the human species, to be thought of in different ways, depending on which gender one is referring to. Colebrook questions the concept of gender, especially where gender is formed, or performed, through language and culture. She critically examines the division between the relationship of the male and female, questioning whether the difference between the

⁴ This will be discussed further in section 2.3.2. The body and dualism.

two is a case of biology, culture or philosophy. She further investigates how this difference inevitably leads to the male and female being viewed as "...two essentially different principles" (Colebrook 2004:12). This inquiry causes one to wonder, what does the corporeal, biological sex signify in terms of identity? If the social structures that Butler believes to form gender could be momentarily removed, would the biological human sex have any impact in the formation of a person's gender? To provide an answer to these questions, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between the body and the mind.

2.3.2. The body and dualism

In the introduction of her book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism* (1994), Elizabeth Grosz explains that philosophy and feminism has found itself occupied with the concept of dualism. Dualism is based on the notion that there are two clear, mutually extensive and exclusive elements, namely the body and the mind - the mental and the physical. Each of these two separate elements exists in its own definitive plane (Grosz 1994:6). In Western Enlightenment philosophy, this separation of the mind and the body, termed Cartesian dualism, has usually regarded the mind to be superior to the body. In the process, and along with embedded societal patterns of patriarchy and oppression, this separation has led to the privileging of the disembodied, masculine, Western elite. Within a patriarchal system, women have, in contrast to men, been considered to be much more closely connected to their bodies as a result of specific 'biological, physiological and endocrinological' processes, such as menstruation, pregnancy and menopause (Grosz 1994:14). A woman's body is supposedly connected to emotionality, irrationality and sensuality, which renders her dangerous and unstable. The female body is regarded as too sexual and unruly, and therefore needs to be tamed by the disembodied and objective masculine scientist (Davis 1997:5). In essence, the female body has been associated with negative connotations, supposedly being closer to nature, more biological and more corporeal and therefore inferior within the patriarchal society (Grosz 1994:14).

When feminists began to argue for the rights to their own sexuality, fertility and abortion, the female body began making its way into feminist discourse. Feminists began to analyse how the female body was situated within science and biology (Davis 1997:4). From these investigations, the feminists expressed one of two oppositional viewpoints. Feminists who supported the first viewpoint advocated that emphasis on sexual difference between the 'male corporeal form' and the 'female corporeal form' resulted in reinforcing oppression and homogenisation, and they thus chose to focus their arguments within the realm of the mind. From the opposite perspective, some feminists viewed sexual difference as essential to the understanding of embodiment, and they based their analysis on the female body (Davis 1997:8-9).

2.3.3. Feminism and difference

As Susan Bordo⁵ stated in 1993, the “...female body is the object of processes of domination and control, as well as the site of women’s subversive practices and struggles for self-determination and empowerment”. Drawing from this, one can see how the female body can be viewed in one of two ways: as an oppressed object of male dominance, or as a tool for resistance and subversion. From this, I am able to clarify the two opposing feminist perspectives related to the corporeal feminine.

The first perspective contends that the body should not be employed at all to argue difference, and thus, similarly to Western Enlightenment philosophy, places a focus on the mind. Here, it is believed that theorising difference from the perspective of the body too easily leads to the naturalisation of difference on the basis of race, gender and sexuality. This in turn leads to social equality being seen as a biological, scientific and natural fact. Feminists who have argued from this perspective are of the opinion that emphasis on bodily difference contributes to essentialism and homogenisation. Essentialism is seen as viewing the world as being made up by certain unchangeable features, which we interpret through culture and language. These features stay the same, despite changes in knowledge or culture (Colebrook 2004:14). Biological sex, specifically defined according to male and female genitalia, is viewed as an ‘essential feature’ of the body. To combat essentialism, feminists believed that differences between the sexes occur as a result of social, rather than biological, construction (Davis 1997:8). This perspective generally focussed on gender rather than sex, which opened a space for gender fluidity⁶.

Although it is possible to see why feminists have sometimes avoided theorising the body, this perspective did not escape criticism. One important problem that arose from avoiding arguing for sexual difference, is that there was a lack in theorisation and analysis of the female body. Furthermore, by avoiding the conceptualisation of difference, oppressive power relations that are caused by this difference may merely become invisible rather than being addressed and solved.

Resulting from the gap within feminist study, the second perspective that I wish to discuss was developed. From this point of view, difference is essential for forming an understanding feminine embodiment. Gender, race, culture and sexuality were believed to have an influence on the way in which an individual’s embodied reality is shaped, meaning that certain individuals may experience limitations where others may not. These feminists believed that to ignore the various ‘embodiments’ lived by different individuals was ‘falsely universalist’ and resulted in injustice. Luce Irigaray

⁵ Bordo is a prominent thinker in gender and women’s studies. She is known for her essays on the bodies of women, such as *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (1993). She is employed at the Department of Gender and Women’s Studies at the University of Kentucky (University of Kentucky 2015).

⁶ Such as transgender men and women.

and Julia Kristeva are two key proponents of difference feminism. These feminists believed that the female body should not simply be reduced to a site of oppression, but should be seen as a tool for empowerment and subversion (Davis 1997:9). Luce Irigaray saw a special power in sexual difference. She believed that it has the ability to result in life (as a result of reproduction), and particularly to result in differentiated life. In her analysis of Irigaray's theory, Elisabeth Grosz argues that life without sexual difference will still result in life, but it will be of the 'bacterial kind', in which life will reproduce itself simply as the same, except perhaps for a genetic mutation in some instances. Grosz (2011:101) believes that sexual difference is needed for the production of "...unique, irreplaceable...historically specific" generations.

2.3.4. Fusion of body and mind

It is clear that there are faults in a feminist perspective that takes an either/or approach regarding the mind-to-body/sex-to-gender relationship. For this reason, feminists of the late third wave, such as Judith Butler, Rosi Braidotti and Elisabeth Grosz have attempted to rethink the relationship between the body and the mind. Instead of considering the body and mind to be a dualist split, these feminists consider the body as a 'crucial site of gender constitution' (i.e. the mind and body, as well as sex and gender, work together to form identity). They are of the opinion that sexual difference has thus far been expressed through the 'negation' of the body, and this needs to be addressed (Bray & Colebrook 1998:36). It is also noted that considering the body as a 'brute given would lead to biological determinism' (Bray & Colebrook 1998:42), which reinforces a very narrow understanding of sex and gender. To explain this way of thinking, Grosz views the relationship between the body and the mind as a Mobius strip, where the inside-out is also seen as the outside-in, or the Mobius strip shows the "...inflection of the mind into the body and the body into the mind...through a kind of twisting or inversion". The result of this inversion is that each side becomes the other (Grosz 1994:xii). Braidotti (1994:1) captured the importance of the celebration of difference well in her concept of the feminist nomad. In this concept, she first acknowledges the differences between women and men, and then carries on to indicate the differences among women. Thereafter, she contends that there are also differences "within each woman". According to her, it is the capability to shift between these levels in different orders and combinations, to form intricate identity layers, which leads to the formation of the nomad (Kaminski 1996:93).

The corporeal feminine that I wish to theorise here is one in which the Mobius strip concept is put to use. The mind and body are interlinked entities, which can be utilised interchangeably to form identity. An inclusive, dual perspective advocated by the nomad further identifies that differences between women, and differences within each individual woman, should be acknowledged in feminist theories of the corporeal. An impactful statement presented by Bray and Colebrook is that "The body is a negotiation with images, but it is also a negotiation with pleasures, pains, other bodies,

spaces, visibility, and medical practice; no single event in this field can act as a general ground for determining the status of the body” (1998:43).

To conclude, it is important to attempt to find ways in which difference can be embraced without hierarchy or dualism. It is even more important to do so within the multicultural society of South Africa, which has a difficult history of colonialism and racial oppression through Apartheid. These complex historical influences lead each woman to experience her body differently within this space.

2.4. Corporeal Themes

By investigating feminist theories and perspectives regarding corporeality, three themes that resonated with me were identified. The themes are investigated in this section, with the aim of incorporating them into the feminist comic book that was used as a tool for data collection. These were: body fluids and shame, the *matrixial borderspace* and naked protest. They could be utilised to explore the corporeal feminine in a practical space, which would in turn lead to the production of affect responses from the participants of this study.

2.4.1. Body fluids

“There remains a broadly common coding of the female body as a body which leaks, which bleeds, which is at the mercy of hormonal and reproductive functions...for the girl, menstruation, associated as it is with blood, with injury and the wound, with a mess that does not dry invisibly, that leaks, uncontrollable, not in sleep, in dreams, but whenever it occurs, indicates the beginning of an out-of-control status that she was led to believe ends with childhood” (Grosz 1994:204-205).

While flows and fluids of the body cannot be consciously controlled in cases such as menstruation, attitudes towards them are based on cultural constructs, which can be challenged. This theme therefore investigates methods to alternately view corporeal flows, in a manner which opposes negative connotations which are known to be attached to these flows.

In patriarchal society, menstruation and other corporeal leaks are associated with shame, disgust, embarrassment and contamination (Grosz 1994:206; Schooler et al. 2005:324-325). It is also believed by feminists that menstruation, as a specific ‘leak’, has been used as a tool to suppress, devalue and place stigma on women (Sveinsdóttir 2016:1391). It is understood that these negative attitudes towards menstruation can be constructed in dominant societal discourses by means of various sources, such as education, parent-to-child relations and the media (Jackson & Falmagne 2013:380). As a point of concern, Jackson and Falmagne (2013:381)

believe that the emphasis of menstruation as a taboo leads to it being disconnected from its empowering link to 'reproduction and motherhood'.

Some scholars, such as Luce Irigaray, have attempted to positively rethink the symbolism of the female corporeal flows. Irigaray specifically imagined the mucus as a powerful symbol of representation. The mucus as symbolic has been interpreted by Margaret Whitford as offering a method by which the imaginary body can move into a space that does not allude to the phallic order, and in the process does not resort to the concept of castration⁷. An alternative symbolic philosophy is proposed "...in which women would no longer be used for men's self-affection and self-protection..." (1991:98).

2.4.2. Naked Protest

As feminine body fluids, especially menstrual blood, are viewed with such negativity, the organs from which these fluids flow are also seen as polluted and dirty (Grosz 1994:206). Feminists have questioned how the female sex organ can be reinterpreted to disrupt oppressive discourses. In response to Freud's infamous psychoanalytic theories of sexual development, which name the phallus as the organ from which all sexuality is developed, feminists such as Britt-Marie Schiller (2012:1162) have attempted to rethink the symbolism pertaining to female sexuality. Schiller, for example, suggests a 'labial framework' to theorise beyond the phallus. This framework draws on Irigaray's powerful statement, "By our lips we are women" (1895:209-210), which plays on both the concept of speech and sexuality. The lips add both a new symbolic image, and protest the silencing of women from meaning-making (Whitford 1991:100). Schiller's labial framework is especially powerful, because it emphasises that women should not repress their sexuality to the point where it only serves the function of reproduction. As the labia do not serve any specific reproductive function, they cannot be reduced to merely a reproductive function. For this reason, the labial framework effectively ties female sexuality into the symbolic sphere. It does however, still make reference to reproduction, and therefore does not deny women's reproductive capabilities. In other, broader cases, movements such as 'Free the Nipple' have utilised the literal, naked female body to address the stigma thereof. This campaign functions as a reclamation of the woman's body and her sexual comfort and desire. It also aims to protect women from physical and emotional abuse and misuse (Peterson 2018).

⁷ Freud's phallic order denotes the female body as 'lacking', in which the female body's 'lack' of a penis is believed to bring about the fear of castration in a male child. The constant reminder of the 'castration wound' is supposedly utilised as a reason to punish the female, by forcing her to be subordinate to the male. Furthermore, in Freud's analysis, only the vagina is recognised as a viable sex organ for women, and completely disregards the clitoris (Freud 1932:281-292).

2.4.3. The *matrixial borderspace*

The *matrixial borderspace* is a concept that was coined by Bracha Ettinger. This concept is utilised to view the female body, specifically the relationship between the mother and the foetus in the womb, as a space that precedes the symbolic order. The mother takes on the representation of that which is 'other', the 'non-I', or the 'm(Other)'⁸, while the foetus is representational of the familiar subject, or 'I' (Ettinger 2006:220). In the Western symbolic order, the male subject is usually placed at the top of the hierarchy (Kenny 2015:188). Two 'mutually unknown elements' inhabit the same space without fusion or rejection taking place. This is described as a relationship of 'co-poiesis', or as Ettinger describes this fluid process of exchange, "...the interlacing co-poietic strings and threads create the ever-transforming transgressive metamorphic borderlinks in a relatively stable yet fluid jointness in severality" (Ettinger 2005:704). This results in a space of co-existence and co-creation, where meaning stems from the dual narrative of separate subjects in harmony with each other. Ettinger (2005:704) describes this co-existence as wit(h)nessing - the 'other' is observing the subject, who is observing the 'other'. Furthermore, she explains that this process invokes fascinance. This is defined as:

"...an aesthetic event that operates in the prolongation and delaying of the time of the encounter-event and allows a working-through of Matrixial differentiating-in-jointness and co-poiesis. *Fascinace* can take place only in a borderlinking within a real, traumatic or phantasmatic, compassionate hospitality. *Fascinace* might turn into *fascinum* when castration, separation, weaning, or splitting abruptly intervenes" (Pollock 2006:61).

Fascinace describes this moment in which the phallic order is momentarily abandoned, in which the 'other' is embraced. As is stated above, as soon as awareness of the phallic order is reinstated, *fascinace* becomes *fascinum*, which refers to Freud's notion of the castration wound and therefore the repulsion of the 'other' (Pollock 2017:269).

This is a significant concept, especially as it is one of few feminist notions that explore feminine representation prior to the 'symbolic order', in which the womb is not analysed according to its opposition to the phallus, but rather as a parallel addition to it (Nigianni 2009:2). This representation is therefore an interesting break from societal power structures, especially in contrast to the societal perception of menstruation, which is viewed as shameful and dirty. Although Ettinger does not elaborate on what happens to the symbolic realm beyond the *matrixial borderspace*, her concept provides an important framework for similar, non-phallic conceptions.

⁸ In the case of the mother-other, the mother is referred to as the m(Other) (Ettinger 2006:218).

2.5. Affect Theory

In order to understand how affect theory was used in this study, I wish to deviate slightly from defining this complex term.

During the Women's Liberation Movement, which occurred during the second feminist wave, woman 'underground'⁹ comic artists created artwork that was renowned for featuring topics related to the corporeal feminine. These comics discussed women's 'taboo' topics, such as masturbation and menstruation, and often did so by featuring the female body and its sexual organs in very direct and sometimes explicit ways (Sabin 1993:225). Interestingly, it has been said that corporeal feminist artworks that feature sexuality, particularly women's genitals, have not always been viewed as devices that positively embrace womanhood, sexual freedom and autonomy, but have instead been received as sexual mockery and sometimes even as vulgarity (Parker 1985:44-45). Other, more positive perspectives view these comics as being empowering, as *celebrations* of womanhood.

As the intention was to create a comic that investigates the corporeal feminine, I aimed to utilise 'affect theory' to better formulate an understanding of how corporeal feminist comics may be perceived, especially now, during the dawning of a potential 'fourth' feminist wave. Furthermore, an interesting reason for combining affect theory and corporeal feminism in this research, is that both concepts are concerned with the way in which the mind and the body work (or, from a different perspective, do not work) together. And so, as a second theoretical theme, I will be looking at the concept of 'affect'.

2.5.1. Affect defined

This term can be defined as "...that which encompasses and exceeds more individualized conceptions of emotion, as interactive and embodied intensities that circulate as 'forces of encounter'" (Seigworth & Gregg 2010:2; McKenzie 2017:187) or, put simply, the process by which the mind of another can be experienced (Rutherford 2016:292).

An apt description of affect is proposed by Elspeth Probyn, who describes it as the 'goosebump effect'. This is found in the moment when something - an event, a film, a text - causes one to react with a "...frisson of feelings, remembrances, thoughts and the bodily actions that accompany them", which can also be described as an 'embodied acknowledgement' (Probyn 2004:29). This feeling is difficult to explain and

⁹ Underground comics (or *comix*) were an alternative medium of comics; they were self-published by artists and often distributed on college campuses. The self-publishing aspect of this medium allowed a greater freedom in terms of content that was not possible to achieve via the 'above-ground press', specifically featuring explicit sex scenes, drug use and violence (Spiggle 1986:101-102).

it is not always easy to indicate exactly what caused the reaction, as affect often occurs as an unconscious reaction to a stimulus. This denotes a virtual dimension to the concept affect (Zembylas 2006:11). Affect is the 'feeling of having a feeling' (Rutherford 2016:286). This also means that it is not always possible to predict what affect may occur during certain circumstances. Each individual body affects other bodies, and is affected by other bodies, differently (Probyn 2004:37).

Affect theory was developed by Silvan Tomkins, who was a clinical psychologist working in America from approximately nineteen-fifty to nineteen-seventy. When he started to work in psychopathology, he developed the theory of affect based on Darwin's theory regarding the instinctive and unconscious nature of human emotions. During this time, he observed nine different 'affects', which appear in polarised pairs: "disgust-contempt, shame-humiliation, fear-terror, distress-anguish, anger-rage, surprise-startle, enjoyment-joy, interest-excitement." (Probyn 2004:26). Out of the nine affects, only two are truly positive; enjoyment-joy and interest-excitement. Furthermore, it has been claimed that each individual affect plants itself in its own unique 'address' of the brain, which reacts upon a 'neural firing'. This results in affects manifesting in various ways (Nathanson 1996:1-21). A vast range of variations allows individuals to react to events in very different manners. A specific individual may care deeply about something, while another may be completely unconcerned. The relationship between affect and this reaction of 'care' in individuals, has led to affect being seen as the theory of 'the mindful body' (Strathern 1996:3; Probyn 2004:27). The 'care' aspect of affect can work to either cause attraction, provocation or repulsion depending on a specific individual's experience. Susan Best (2002:210) advocates that a positive affect will cause an impelling corporeal engagement ('moving towards' or attraction), while a negative affect will result in a repelling corporeal engagement ('moving away' or repulsion).

Furthermore, affect should not be understood as emotion. Instead, affect and emotion denote different models of being (Zembylas 2006:310). Emotion is seen as that which links to the mind, while affect generally concerns the body. Emotion is also said to take place within specific, predictable cultural norms and institutional bodies, while affect is inconsistent and unpredictable. As an example, Michalinos Zembylas (2006:310) indicated that 'hate and love' are forces that are unyielding to bodily confinement; however, once an individual stipulates that 'I love or I hate', it becomes a conscious expression of emotion based within a particular cultural understanding and way of knowing. Thus, while the two are disparate, they are also similar in the sense that affect is what leads to the production of emotion (Rutherford 2016:286). In fact, this concept manifests itself through a variety of the human senses that relate to the body; through taste, sound, smell, touch and movement (Seigworth & Gregg 2010:8).

2.5.2. Affect, signification and culture

“Affect is the flesh of the signifier and the signifier of the flesh” (Green 1997:174).

As can be seen in the above, André Green made the connection regarding the way in which affect is placed within the symbolic realm. Green links affect to the signifier (rather than that which is signified). In the case of embodied experiences, affect thus takes the form of the ‘prepersonal’, which then aids with signification to become conscious meaning or feeling. This entails that making meaning from affect occurs in a delayed manner, as is the case with signification. Affect without signification is not instantaneously understandable, therefore it is necessary for a process of reflection to take place for it to gain meaning. Ultimately, however, meaning and signification tend to be culturally specific, which entails that affect is culturally specific too (Best 2002:218-221). Affect can be understood within a specific cultural framework, and is experienced differently by each individual, depending on their lived experience.

Marcia McKenzie (2017:190) elaborates on this, stating that interaction between societies and cultures is strongly infused with affect. The way in which people function within society is connected to unseen “...registers, habits and excesses of feeling” as well as “sensations or instincts”. Affect can therefore occur as collective understandings between humans, but also between non-human entities, such as objects, places, atmospheres, activities, events or even other affects.

As affect works so closely with cultural structures, this concept also works closely with power structures. Rutherford (2016:290) believes that it is necessary to carefully consider the workings of power, so that the way in which affect is brought into action and implicated into controlling and containing structures can be understood. As an explanation of this, I wish to draw upon the process by which marginalisation may occur via affect. To enforce an oppressive regime (such as colonialism), negative affective interactions of perhaps shame, fear and disgust towards specific citizens can be passed along from a governing body, through political propaganda, to its citizens. This may eventually lead to the propaganda ideologies becoming the dominant discourse, causing those persons attached to the negative affective qualities to become marginalised. Oppression, such as sexism, may be caused in a similar way, by being enforced through patriarchal affective interactions.

In the opposite sense, affective interactions can also be utilised to challenge dominant discourses. Rutherford states that “...as what passes between participants in scenes of interaction, affect is the stuff of new forms of life, new ways of being in the world” (2016:287). With particular relation to my current research, by means of participating in this study, the participants, as well as myself, will be affected through our interaction before, during and after the direct interviews and discussions take place. Perhaps this will generate within us new thoughts or new actions which are able to affect others, and cause small changes that could result in disruptions of dominant power structures.

2.5.3. Affect and corporeal feminism

Affect, when channelled into structures of power, can be used to draw negative connotations to specific topics and result in marginalisation. In terms of corporeal feminism, the female body and its flows have often been linked to negative, repelling forces affect, especially disgust, fear and embarrassment. As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, dominant patriarchal structures have framed female corporeality in such a way that it has become a discourse of silence and control - a discourse that is in many ways regarded as taboo.

By honing in on these negative affects, one can begin to conceptualise ways in which such affects can be challenged and replaced with positive affects. This study aims to investigate the affect of the corporeal feminine, in order to gain a better understanding of how the female body, which has become a sight of domination in patriarchal culture, can become a tool for disruption.

2.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, the topic of feminism was defined and studied from multiple angles. It was shown that corporeal feminism is mainly part of a later manifestation of feminist scholarship, but that feminists fought for the rights of their bodies from the very beginning. Corporeal feminism brought about many debates concerning the split between the body and the mind, and it was concluded that current scholarship concerning this topic should aim to reconsider whether the body and the mind should be seen, not as a dualist pair, but rather from the perspective of a 'Möbius strip'. It was stated that my interest towards the *affect* of corporeal feminism was generated through the debates surrounding second wave feminist underground comics. To explain the way in which affect can be utilised to generate responses that may contribute to solving complex debates, affect theory was defined and examined. An interesting finding relating to affect that is presented in this chapter is the way in which affect is formed within a cultural framework. This means that, while affect can be utilised to enforce dominant power regimes, it can also be employed to deconstruct them.

Chapter 3: Contextualising the study

3.1. Introduction

The case study forms itself within a bounded context. This means any data pertaining to a case study is specific to the time and environment in which it was collected (Njie & Asimiran 2014:36). For this reason, it is of importance that the specific context in which this study took place should be clearly acknowledged, as this influences the results that will be obtained from the research. The research environment was formed within a South African, tertiary level education setting. Additionally, an illustrated comic book was created by the researcher specifically with the aim of exploring the corporeal feminine, and was utilised as the main tool for data collection. This comic drove the nature of participant responses, and therefore further bound the context of the study to a personal object of artistic expression. This chapter will therefore serve as an explanation of the study environment, and will also provide a brief discussion of the artwork that was created.

3.2. The research environment

3.2.1. A historical overview of South African education

Owing to a troubling segregated past, South Africa is a country divided by a variety of aspects, such as race, class, gender, ethnicity and language (Enslin, 2003:73). From 1948 until 1994, South Africa was ruled under a strict governmental system, which enforced the separation of its citizens according to racial classification. The Apartheid regime was designed according to a 'divide and conquer' strategy, which was especially apparent in the education system. Education for black students was formulated in such a way as to only allow them to become wage labourers, and generally to indoctrinate them to believe that they were too weak to challenge the system (Abdi 2002:34). The *Bantu Education Act* of 1953 was an official law that was passed to separate black education from white education during this time (Van Rensburg 2008:280). 'White' schools and universities were provided with the best funding and resources. These laws meant that people classified by Apartheid as 'non-whites' were only able to obtain low-paying jobs of unskilled labour, leading to an extremely large number of black South African citizens living in extreme poverty, which is still prevalent today. It is possible to say that, while South Africa has abolished Apartheid, the latter has been replaced with a more subtle, racialised classism (Seekings & Nattrass 2005:4-6; Soni & Hay 2015).

The above historical knowledge allows for the educational institution involved in this South African case study to be placed within a specific socio-cultural context.

The study took place at a private tertiary level institution situated in the Western Cape environment¹⁰. This institution caters towards upper-class students, as the study fees are expensive in comparison to other institutions which offer similar courses (DII, 2018). Owing to this, and in light of the racialised classism taking place in South Africa, the majority of the students at the institution were white. The volunteers formed part of a class of thirty-two students, of which twenty-seven (84.4%) students were white. This institution was not chosen according to any specific socio-political reasoning, but was chosen due to its availability, willingness to participate in the research project, the subjects offered in its curriculum, and because of my personal study and working relationship with the institution. This relationship allowed me access to trusted connections in this space, and also provided me with a better understanding of the functioning of the institution and its curriculum. Due to the educational environment in which the study took place, it is important to indicate that the data is contained within a specific socio-cultural context, which may change the arguments that surface during the research, especially as they pertain to the topic of South African feminism.

3.2.2. The institutional landscape

The institution involved in this study aims to educate students in fields of visual communication, such as graphic design and illustration. As part of their curriculum, all the students are required to take Visual Studies as an additional theory class, in which topics such as feminism, critical race theory and social justice are discussed. This subject teaches students to look at visual imagery and contemporary culture in a critical way, through an integrated engagement with art history, philosophy, sociology and anthropology. By including student participants with knowledge of feminist discourses, the students were able to confidently provide their opinions with regard to the topic, and were able to relate to the discussion on an academic level. Furthermore, all of the participants were majoring in the subject of illustration. By studying illustration through this institution, the participants were exposed to a variety of illustration forms, such as textile, narrative, characterisation and packaging design (DII, 2018). By combining their critical thinking skills and their knowledge of narrative illustration, the participants of this study were able to effectively and critically engage with the comic that was presented to them during the interview process, in order to produce rich and unique data.

¹⁰ In order to protect the confidentiality of this institution, any information that was directly obtained through their website will be indicated by means of the following code: direct institutional information (DII) and the year during which the information was collected, namely 2018.

3.3. The creation of a feminist comic book

In order to obtain the data that I required as a researcher, I, as an artist, needed to create a comic that would stimulate the participants to engage with concepts of corporeal feminism. In order to do so, it was necessary to combine the theory that I was studying with the practical illustration process. I thus adopted a method of praxis.

3.3.1. Praxis in art

“In relation to my own art practice research, theory, practice and their interrelation...could be seen as fluid, shifting, multilayered and circular concepts that encompass collisions, slippages and overlaps. By embracing theory and practice as unstable and shifting, this approach opens up a spatiality comprising of a multiplicity of mobile and heterogeneous spaces within/between the theory/practice relation in which one must continuously negotiate one's position in order for meaning to be made” (Taylor 2014:305).

The term ‘praxis’ is utilised in art education as the need to adopt a reciprocal approach to theory and practice, meaning that one would theorise practice and practice theory. A process of critical reflection therefore allows for enlightenment in action. The ‘transformed action’ causes a changed perception towards the object of reflection (Torres & Mercado 2004:60-61). The creation of the comic titled *Shapes of Flow* entailed a back and forth praxis process, in which theoretical themes of corporeal feminism¹¹ were identified to formulate a concept for a comic narrative. Three main themes that were identified to form three interconnected short stories in the comic were: ‘menstruation and shame’, ‘exploration of the *matrixial borderspace* and the labial framework¹²’ and ‘the body as a tool for societal disruption’. These three themes were weaved into the stories through symbols, narrative and character interaction. Throughout the comic, the theoretical relationship between the mind and the body was also explored, especially with the attempt to view this relationship as a ‘Möbius strip’ (Grosz 1994:xii). As an example of this, the second story *Breaking Waves*, which can be viewed below, illustrates an imaginary scenario in which a pregnant woman explores and experiences the process of birth. Her womb is both part of her, as well as the landscape that surrounds her.

The drawing process was completed with careful consideration of the representation of characters, power relations between characters, and the representation of colour in the artwork. The style of illustration could not be fully controlled, as this is specific to the hand of the artist. This means that the artwork is tied to the artist as the author, and conclusively expresses a very personal, context-bound voice.

¹¹ See Chapter 2 (Theoretical perspectives).

¹² See Chapter 2 (Theoretical perspectives).

Lastly, in order to add a third layer of representation to the artwork, the book cover was covered with silicone to resemble the texture of skin. In this case, the theory of affect was put to work. Seigworth and Gregg (2010:8) state that affect can manifest through a variety of human senses, including the sense of touch. This was therefore an attempt to include as many affect-prompting platforms as possible.

To conclude, the comic appearing in the next section was created through a process of critical reflection, and aims to draw affective responses regarding corporeal feminism from the participants of this study. The environment of this study was created within the South African landscape, and therefore reflects a voice from one of the many perspectives found in this multicultural community.

3.4. Shapes of flow: A feminist comic book



Fig 1. Hunter, K. 2018. Shapes of Flow. Stellenbosch: Scaly Studios.

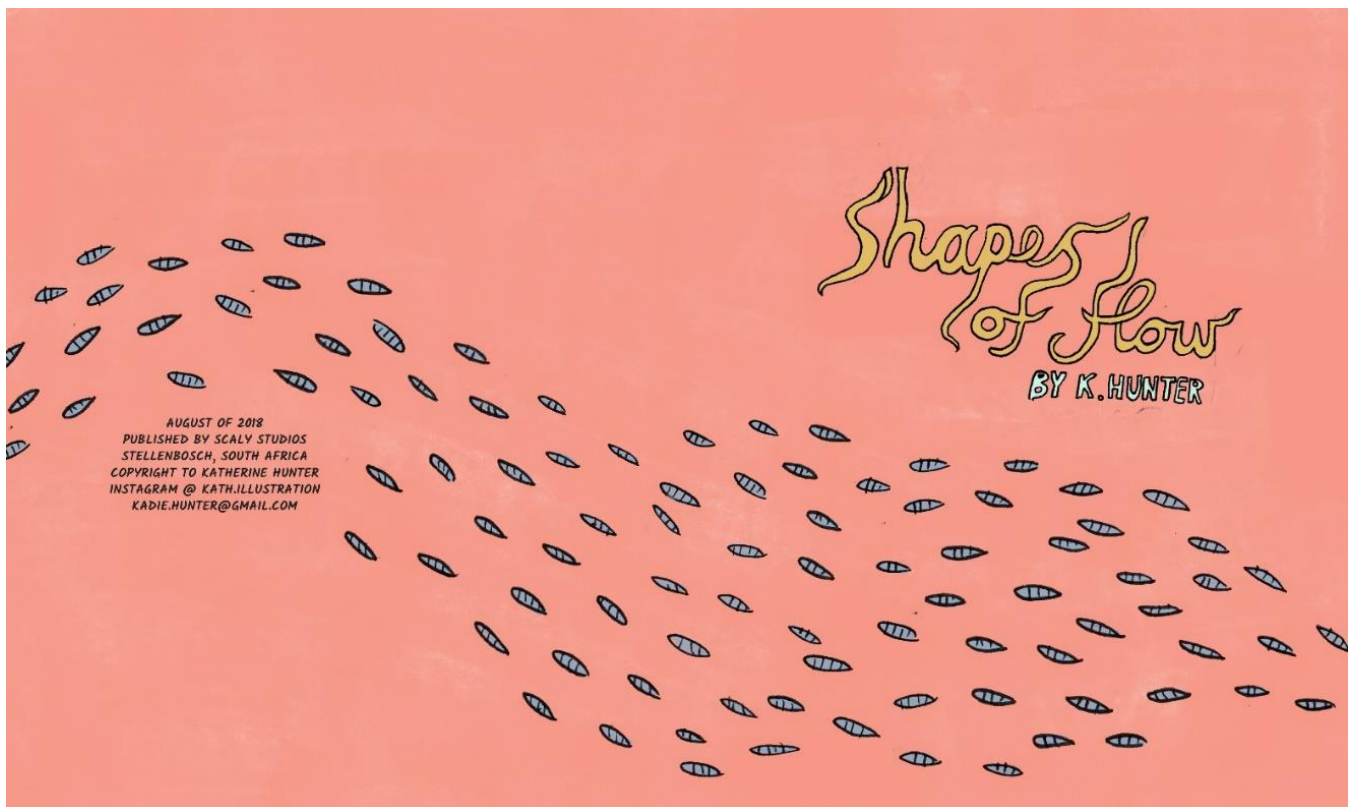


Fig 2. Hunter, K. 2018. Shapes of Flow. Stellenbosch: Scaly Studios.



Fig 3. Hunter, K. 2018. Shapes of Flow. Stellenbosch: Scaly Studios.



Fig 4. Hunter, K. 2018. Shapes of Flow. Stellenbosch: Scaly Studios.



Fig 5. Hunter, K. 2018. Shapes of Flow. Stellenbosch: Scaly Studios.

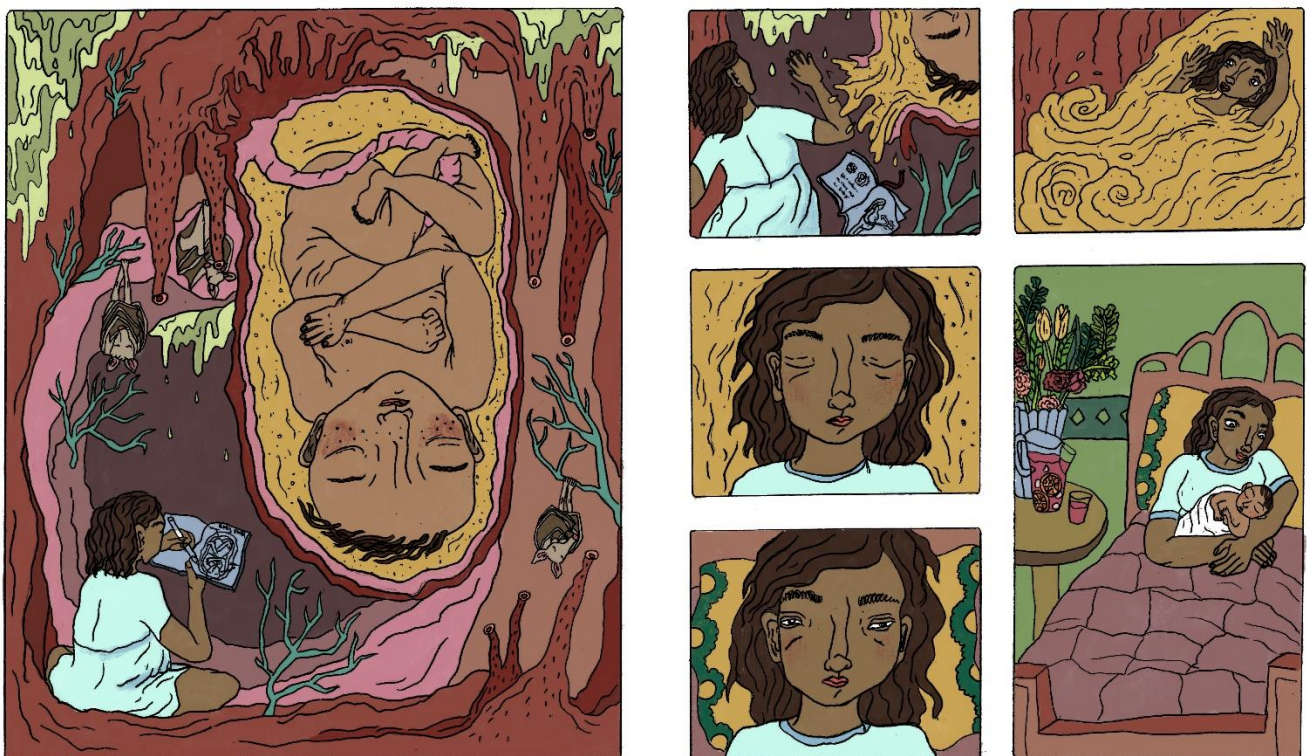


Fig 6. Hunter, K. 2018. Shapes of Flow. Stellenbosch: Scaly Studios.



Fig 7. Hunter, K. 2018. Shapes of Flow. Stellenbosch: Scaly Studios.



Fig 8. Hunter, K. 2018. Shapes of Flow. Stellenbosch: Scaly Studios.

4. Methodology

4.1. Introduction

This study, framed within a feminist perspective, aims to investigate the *affective responses* that a *corporeal feminist* comic book may generate from the study participants. Using a naturalistic research paradigm, qualitative data was collected by means of a case study research design. An interpretive, inductive approach was employed throughout the data analysis process. The study required the participation of Visual Communication students from a South African tertiary academic institution, and therefore the data was collected by ethical means to ensure the protection of both the institution involved, as well as the participants. All the responses were documented as accurately as possible, to ensure validity and reliability.

4.2 Research approach and design

As this study aims to utilise *affect theory*¹³ as one of its main theoretical perspectives, and also considers the existence of multiple social realities experienced by different people, a *naturalistic* research paradigm, along with qualitative data collection, was appropriate.

As defined by Egon Guba (1981:77), a naturalistic research paradigm is known for its belief that multiple constructions of reality are present in the minds of the participants, and that analysis will “diverge rather than converge” as more knowledge is gained. It also believes that segments of reality are interconnected, which means that, through the examination of one part, all the other parts will be impacted. Here, the communication between the researcher and the participant is also seen as influential, in the sense that these interchanges will impact the data. Furthermore, this paradigm assumes that it is not possible to attain a generalised ‘truth’, but rather aims to develop a ‘working hypothesis’. Lastly, this approach allows for the theory to emerge from the data (Guba 1981:77).

Qualitative data is usually collected with the purpose of ‘description’. Such descriptions come from observation, participant interviews and discussion, and analysis usually occurs by means of inductive interpretation (Mohajan 2018:28). A matter of importance for the qualitative researcher is the collection of participant opinions and experiences, which are positioned within contextual, situated knowledge. As Elizabeth Domholdt (1993) states, qualitative research aims to gain an intensive ‘understanding of the particular’.

¹³ Simply defined as ‘embodied forces of encounter’ (Seigworth & Gregg 2010:2).

Furthermore, a case study research design was applied, as case studies can be advantageous, in the sense that they supply the researcher with very specific data that exists within a specified time and place. A case is "...a study of the singular, the particular, (and) the unique" and can be seen as the inquiry into real-life contexts (Njie & Asimiran 2014:36). A case can involve a variety of research subjects, such as people, organisations, classrooms, programmes and even structures. A "system or an event" could also act as a case (Simons 2012:3-6).

Simons (2012:6-7) interprets qualitative case studies as cases which find a range of participant perspectives relevant, and also believes in the significance of observations which can be collected and interpreted during authentic, unforced conditions. These studies consider the way that participants understand and act within their self-constructed realities, and the way in which a researcher utilises their own understanding to interpret such constructed realities.

The 'case' of this study is situated within a South African perspective, and involves the participation of students studying Visual Communication in the Western Cape region. The case thus takes place within the space of South African feminism, which places an emphasis on inclusivity of the different races and cultural groups that constitute the citizens of this African country.

4.3. Sampling and data collection

The participants in this study were members of a South African tertiary design institution. All the participants were Visual Communication students, studying Illustration. As the subject of Visual Studies forms part of their academic curriculum, all the students have a basic knowledge of feminism, as this topic is discussed in their classes as part of the institution's curriculum. They would thus also have been exposed to some form of corporeal feminism prior to the study. This familiarity with feminism, and especially corporeal feminism, may have caused these students to respond to the study in a slightly different manner compared to others, who have little to no knowledge of the topic.

Nine of the students who participated were female, while two were male¹⁴. It was important to reach participants from more than one gender group, as they could have different understandings and attitudes towards the topic of feminism. All the participants joined the study on a voluntary basis, and therefore a specific number of male and female participants could not be predicted prior to the study. To invite the students to volunteer, an announcement was made during their class time, during which the nature and procedure of the study was explained to them. They were then asked to indicate whether they wished to volunteer during their private contact sessions. The final study comprised of eleven participants. The students' ages were

¹⁴ This unbalanced gender ratio occurred because the academic institution where the study was completed has a much larger ratio of female students in comparison to males. In the class of thirty-two students, only seven were male.

between eighteen and twenty-five, but they could be grouped as belonging to their first year of tertiary education.

Data collection was completed by means of semi-structured interviews, a group discussion, observations (of atmosphere and corporeal engagement) and field notes. The interviews and the group discussion were recorded using a personal cellular device, and were immediately transferred to a personal computer when the discussions were complete. Any interesting observations that were made were collected in written format, in a notebook. Personal data pertaining to my own reflection process regarding the making of the artwork and the experience of the discussions and interviews, was collected in written format. Further personal reflections were collected during a personal, recorded interview.

A group discussion was added as an additional space for data collection, as it is believed that group discussions help to ‘diffuse power’ between the participants and the researcher, especially when the matter being researched deals with the study of power structures - which is indeed what feminism is (Krane *et al.* 2001:24) An important advantage of group discussions is that they allow students to share ideas and elaborate on the points that their co-participants make. They thus work collaboratively to answer the interview questions, which results in the emergence of multiple perspectives within the data of a single question. There is also a clear disadvantage to group discussions, as they may lead to participants withholding information that they do not feel comfortable sharing in a social setting. In contrast, data that is withheld may be an indicator of whether a certain topic is considered to be appropriate or inappropriate to discuss in a social situation. This can be useful to identify negative *affects* that have been fused with social power structures.

4.3.1. The interview questions

The interview questions were open-ended, and aimed to gain affect responses towards the corporeal feminist comic book, as well as towards the feminist themes occurring within the artwork. Although it is difficult to understand another person’s affect response, the participants’ actions and answers in response to the comic and the interview questions could be noted down and recorded, so that these responses could be interpreted according to the theoretical knowledge provided in Chapter 2 (Theoretical Perspectives). Although the wording may have differed slightly during the discussions, the individual interview questions were as follows:

- 1) What immediate emotions¹⁵ come to mind when you look at these images?
- 2) What is your interpretation/understanding of the story?

¹⁵ The participants are asked to voice their emotions, as affect is the subconscious cause of emotion. Affect is not easily voiced and understood, and therefore, by asking the participants how the comic made them feel, it is easier for myself as the researcher to interpret the potential underlying affects that may have caused their voiced emotion, especially when these emotions are combined with the participants’ corporeal responses, personal relations to the story and their interpretations of the story.

- 3) Can you relate to any of the images personally? If so, then in what way?
- 4) Can you describe any particular themes that may stand out to you? If so, why do they stand out?
- 5) Which image do you feel the most drawn towards and why?
- 6) Is there an image that you find repulsive/discomforting? What do you think is causing you to react this way?
- 7) Have you seen any artworks similar to this? What were they and what was your reaction to them?
- 8) Is your overall reaction to the comic mostly positive or negative? Please briefly reflect on this.
- 9) Are there any further remarks or suggestions that you would like to add?

The group discussion questions were more specifically aimed towards gaining an understanding of the participants' understandings of feminism and power structures. The participants were also volunteers who had already answered the first section of questions. The questions that were asked in the group discussion were as follows:

- 1) How do you define the word 'feminism'?
- 2) What is feminism specifically as it relates to the body?
- 3) Do you think there is anything unique about South African feminism? Please elaborate.
- 4) What does the word 'empower' mean to you?
- 5) Do you think it is important to acknowledge and celebrate differences between people in terms of gender and culture? Please elaborate.
- 6) What does 'equality' mean to you?
- 7) How can education be used to work towards achieving a concept such as equality?

4.3.2. Participant codes

In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants of the study, they were identified throughout this thesis by a code. This code was given to the students in consecutive order, from the very first participant, through to the last. To keep the coding simple, the first letter of the code indicated that they were a student (S), while the following number indicated their order of participation (1-11). As the data received from the male participants differed slightly from that of the female participants, the participants' sex was also included in the code according to female (f) or male (m). Some of the interviews were conducted in English, while some were conducted in Afrikaans and thereafter translated into English. English students are identified with

an 'E', while Afrikaans students are identified with an 'A'. Lastly, an indicator of the participants' race was also included in the code. As racial segregation has played such a large role in shaping feminism in South Africa, participants of differing race groups may have responded to the questions in different ways. According to the Stellenbosch University *Style Guide* (Stellenbosch University 2014:36-37), the terms black, white, coloured or Indian can be used to indicate race in South Africa. Race is therefore indicated with 'b', 'w', 'c' or 'I'. Thus, a full code for participant one reads as follows: S1-FAw.

The researcher's data is included in coded format and reads as 'R' for researcher. In cases where the researcher responded in English, the coding reads as (R-FEw), and where the response was translated from Afrikaans, the coding reads as (R-FAw). After the comic had been created and the interviews were conducted, I reflected on the process by answering questions in interview format. The questions were answered in a singular, continuous block of time in order to prompt answers without too much thought prior to the process. This was done specifically to allow more instinctive answers, rather than constructed, carefully thought-through responses. The following questions were addressed:

- 1) What was the biggest challenge in terms of creating the comic?
- 2) Were there any interesting responses from people who were exposed to the comic in the process of creating it?
- 3) Did you have any specific reactions during the interviews?
- 4) Was there anything that you found uncomfortable during the interviews?
- 5) Could you relate to any of the participants' responses personally?
- 6) Have you had any change in opinion since the interviews took place?

4.4. Data Analysis

In order to analyse the collected qualitative data, an interpretive, inductive approach was utilised. Interpretation can be seen as a "...highly skilled cognitive and intuitive process, often involving total immersion in the data, re-reading transcripts, field notes, observations and other forms of data in the data set, such as...narratives" and metaphors (Simons 2012:116). The researcher is therefore highly involved during the 'meaning-making' component of the analysis, as data does not speak for itself. The researcher needs to apply their "intellect, emotions and intuition" to produce interpretations that will place the case into a theorised format (Simons 2012:128).

Furthermore, an inductive approach was taken to analyse the data that was collected during interviews and focus group discussions. According to David Thomas, inductive data analysis can be defined as "...approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from

the raw data by an evaluator or researcher” (2006:238). Thomas further indicates that this approach has three main aims. Firstly, to condense broad and ungrouped ‘raw text data’, so that it is presented within a concise summary. Secondly, inductive analysis aims to form clear, transparent and justifiable connections between the objectives established for the research, and the summarised results which were obtained from the original raw data. Lastly, it aims to formulate concepts and models regarding the original, unrefined sensations and occurrences within the ‘text data’, and thus present a better understanding of these phenomena (Thomas 2006:238). Corbin and Strauss (1998:12) state that during inductive data analysis, the researcher starts within a specific field of inquiry, and then permits theoretical themes to develop and become clear.

By applying the theory outlines above, a frame of inductive data analysis could be developed as follows: the raw ‘text data’ collected through interaction between myself and the participants was studied multiple times, after which specific themes and groupings began to emerge as meaningful clusters (Krane *et al.* 2001:27). These themes were assigned specific codes, so that the relevant information pertaining to an identified theme (e.g. embarrassment) could be readily accessed. This allowed similarities and differences within the data to become clear, so that the opinions of the participants could be connected to broader feminist debates.

4.5. Ethical Considerations

As this study is taking place under the supervision of the Stellenbosch University, it is necessary to formulate an understanding of the policies required of researchers by the *University Research Ethics Policy* (2013). The Stellenbosch University commits itself to research that applies “...the values of equity, participation transparency, service, tolerance and mutual respect, dedication, scholarship, responsibility and academic freedom in all its activities”. In the Stellenbosch University *Research Ethics Policy* it is stipulated that researchers are obligated to capture the research outcomes with transparency and accuracy in public spheres. It is also of importance to ensure that all the participants are involved consensually, and are informed regarding the purpose of the study prior to any data collection. Lastly, participant privacy and confidentiality should be protected throughout and after the research process (Senate Research Ethics Committee 2013:1-5).

In keeping with the Stellenbosch University’s research guidelines, all research was conducted with careful ethical considerations. Permission was obtained from the participating tertiary institution prior to data collection. All the participants were asked to participate on a voluntary basis, and were asked to sign an informative consent form before being interviewed. This consent form contained all the necessary information to inform students of their participatory rights, including what the study would entail.

Although it was not likely that the study would result in physical or emotional harm, some discomfort (such as embarrassment) could be expected from students who were not familiar with corporeal feminism. To guarantee that the participants did not become too uncomfortable, they were ensured that they could stop the interview at any time, and have any collected information destroyed or returned to them.

Upon analysing the information, I took care to interpret their information accurately and with sensitivity. The interviews took place in a safe space of the participants' choice. Lastly, to protect the research results that were collected during the study, all data was kept on a personal password-protected private computer. All hardcopies, such as interview transcripts and consent forms, will be kept in a personal office space, in a closed filing cabinet. Both electronic data and hardcopy data will be destroyed five years after the study is completed.

4.6. Data validity and reliability

According to Egon Guba (1981:83-87), there are four main aspects that can aid the researcher in developing valid and trustworthy research. These are: credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability. Credibility involves an understanding that the researcher's skill to analyse complex data may produce differentiation in the quality of the data. Transferability entails that the research goal be context-specific, meaning that the aim of the study should not be the development of 'truth statements'. Furthermore, confirmability relates to the acknowledgement that researcher bias may influence the neutrality of the data. For this reason, the researcher should take care to be open to various participant opinions, and upon the analysis of the data, should attempt to translate the data with honesty, so that the original intentions of the data are upheld as best as possible. Triangulation methods may be used for assistance in producing reliable data. Triangulation involves cross-checking the data with other sources. In the case of interviews, the researcher can repeat the participant's answers back to them, to ensure that their statements were correctly heard and understood (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2006:65). Lastly, the dependability of the data will arise in its stability, which may become a problem once there are clashes pertaining to the presence of multiple realities. In conclusion, as the researcher in this study, I took care to uphold the above-mentioned strategies throughout and after the research process, in order to ensure the production of valid and trustworthy research. To allow the data to attain credibility, the interviews were recorded and each word was transcribed exactly as it was heard. Each interview and transcript was listened to and read multiple times so that familiarity with the data could be developed. Upon interpreting the data, the data was sorted into meaningful clusters, so that these individual clusters could easily be accessed and analysed individually. When considering the strategy of transferability, it is indicated throughout the study that the data collected during this research is context-specific, and therefore cannot be generalised. In terms of confirmability, I acknowledge that certain data was chosen specifically to aid the

arguments in this study. During the data collection process, however, the questions were kept open-ended and the participants were able to answer the questions freely without interference from myself as the researcher. Lastly, the dependability of the data was influenced by a variety of opinions received from participants during the interviews. These differing opinions are important, as they indicate that the interviewees were able to express their personal opinion as it is formed by their lived reality.

4.7. Conclusion

This chapter has indicated that a case study was employed to collect qualitative data from eleven tertiary level students, who study Visual Communication at a design institution in the Western Cape. A naturalistic research paradigm was utilised, as this study accepts the existence of multiple realities in the experiences of its participants. The data was collected by means of interviews, observations and a group discussion, as well as through the personal reflections of the researcher. An interpretive and inductive approach was utilised to analyse the collected data as accurately and fairly as possible. Great care was taken during these processes to ensure the safety and confidentiality of all the participants, as specified by the *Policy for responsible research conduct at Stellenbosch University*.

Chapter 5: Data and Discussion

5.1. Introduction

In the following section the research findings that were collected during open-ended interviews, field notes and personal reflections will be presented and discussed. The interview data will be discussed first according to themes that were identified during analysis, and thereafter personal reflections will be presented. The aim of the research was to articulate an understanding of how illustration students in the Western Cape respond affectively to a corporeal feminist comic book, titled *Shapes of Flow*, to determine whether this form of artwork is viewed as dis/empowering. The aim of the comic book was an attempt to express a representation of corporeal feminism, which linked the body and mind without contributing to essentialism and homogenisation. The data was collected by means of a qualitative case study. This means that the data was shaped within a specific geographic, cultural and historical framework (Njie & Asimiran 2014:36). It should therefore be noted that the data presented here is not an exhaustive study of feminism, or even of corporeal feminism, but expresses a context-bound reflection thereof.

5.2. Identification of themes

After the interviews were completed, each discussion was separately transcribed, and those that were conducted in Afrikaans were carefully translated into English. To ensure that non-verbal features of affect could be captured, laughter, lengthy pauses during responses, as well as non-lexical conversational sounds, such as 'um' or 'like', were included in the transcripts (Jackson & Falmagne 2013:384). Each interview, including the group discussion, was read multiple times, in order to gain familiarity with the collected content. Using a process of inductive analysis, various themes 'became clear' (Thomas 2006:238; Strauss & Corbin 1998:12) and were sorted according to a coding process. The coding process that was used to classify the data made use of separate colours, which were assigned to participant statements with similarly interpreted meanings. Thus, these themes were based on similarities between participant responses, affective reactions, as well as interesting points that were made that could be related to the theoretical discussion of corporeal feminism and affect. These were used as subthemes.

5.2.1. Table 1: Colours linked to themes found frequently

	'Taboo': the things we do not touch
	Construction and systemic blame
	Sexualisation of the female body
	References to power/empowerment
	Togetherness: power in numbers
	Personal connection/empathy
	Embarrassment/shame
	Equality and difference
	Fascination, corporeal engagement
	Other unique and interesting points

From the various subthemes that were identified, the following could be grouped according to their interpreted meanings to form four concise main themes: corporeality as taboo, impelling forces, and em(power)ment and equal difference.

5.3. Presentation and discussion of data

Depending on a variety of aspects, such as cultural structures, physical circumstances or personal opinion, an individual may react to a situation with either an impelling force of affect, such as joy and excitement, or a repelling force of affect, such as fear, disgust and anger. Affect can result in action and reaction, such as corporeal engagement or bodily responses¹⁶, and many different affects can be experienced at the same time (Probyn 2004:26-27; Best 2002:210). When affected, an individual may also recall previous experiences similar to or relating to the affect. Affect is generally a subconscious experience, but can be interpreted through the conscious expression of emotion (Zembylas 2006:310). Social, cultural and political structures are deeply embedded with positive and negative affects, which can lead to the marginalisation of specific topics, events or individuals (Rutherford 2016:290). The following section will present and discuss the data related to affect, the corporeal feminine, and the way in which these two topics interact.

¹⁶ Or as Probyn calls it, the 'goosebump effect' (2004:29).

5.3.1. Corporeality as 'taboo'

This section investigates the way in which the body, especially the female body, is sexualised, objectified and associated with negative connotations, such as unruliness (Davis 1997:5) and contamination (Grosz 1994:206). Here the 'repelling forces' of affect are at work. These repelling forces lead to the silencing and suppression of the female body, and the processes connected to it (Schooler 2005:324-325). The female body and its corporeal flows are also silenced in discourse. More than one participant declared that they do not normally openly discuss the female body - in some cases not even with close family members. Owing to this suppression, affect responses of embarrassment and shame were often identified during the interviews. Out of all the participants, only four confidently stated that they found nothing in the comic to be uncomfortable or repulsive. Two more stated that they were not uncomfortable or repulsed, but were not as eager as the previous four. The other participants all identified elements that they found '...a bit off-putting...a bit gross' (S6-FEW). These elements generally made reference to body fluids, such as mucus, menstrual blood and amniotic fluid. (S11-FEW) said, "I think bodily fluids in general just kind of get to me". Grosz (1994:204-205) theorised that womanly body fluids are viewed more negatively than those of men, because they do not dry invisibly. Menstrual blood leaves behind a stain, which causes it to be perceived as possessing a higher risk of pollution.

5.3.1.1. Sexualisation of the female body

"I mean, the female body is, it's EROTIC...no matter what part it is" (S2-FEW).

In Western thought, the female body is often connoted with sexual appetite and '...seduction away from God', which has also become a means to present the woman's body as an object that needs to be carefully monitored, tamed and disciplined (Davis 1997:4).

When responding to the comic, (S6-FEW) was quite vocal regarding her opinion towards this. She stated that she would often be caught in an internal conflict when men arrived at social gatherings without shirts on, if women are not permitted to do the same. She stated, "...if a girl wore a top without a bra, all the guys are like 'You can see the nipples...her boobs are out, oh my God.' A guy can...walk around with no shirt on. No one will be like 'He's so promiscuous, he's asking for attention'" (S6-FEW). She did however, express that she felt the women in the comic were not sexualised because "...nothing is exaggerated, nothing is glamorised". She draws on similarities to two artists, namely Venus Libido and Polly Nor. They "...touch on very feminine issues that women go through, and also in a very un-glamorised way. They draw women with hairy legs and rings under their eyes and a bit of body flab...things that are not what you see in Glamour magazines. Although they are in the nude, I don't think anyone gets turned on by that and I think that's quite a big step in desexualising

the woman's body..." (S6-FEw). Five other participants also mentioned that they believe the female body is hyper-sexualised. Most of the responses were drawn from the third segment of the comic book, which made reference to the Free the Nipple movement¹⁷. (S2-FEw) expressed that she strongly supports the Free the Nipple movement, because "I don't have big boobs, I don't need to wear a bra...I've seen so many guys who wear the thinnest shirt and their nipples show. So we both have them, why are they different? Ours are lumpy and that's about it". In contrast, (S4-MAw), who is male, stated that he could not understand why women wanted to be part of the movement; "Because the way I see it, girls don't get aroused when they see men's nipples, but then, from the other perspective, small boys will...because it's constructed as one of those things that will attract you and trigger you". His view shows how normal it has become to view women as hyper-sexualised. Even though he is aware that this view towards women is socially constructed, he states more than once throughout the interview that he does not understand why women wish to be part of the Free the Nipple movement. (S5-FEw) believes that one of the major reasons behind the sexualisation of the female body is the media, such as advertising and television, "...where we are still very much exposed to women as this kind of object, being used as...that whole thing of 'sex sells'. And it's always women being objectified".

All of these opinions tie in to the negative framing of female sexuality that Kathy Davis has identified. Davis states that the female body is the 'other' in the patriarchal order. The woman's body needed to be tamed by the rational male, because she posed a threat to the dominant structure by means of her seductive, distracting (from God) and aggressive nature. The female body had an unlimited sexual and destructive appetite, which was simply too dangerous and, inevitably, needed to be oppressed (Davis 1997:5).

5.3.1.2. Shame and embarrassment

"Although menstruation is a natural, reproductive process, it bears a strong cultural taboo that commands that it not be seen, discussed, or in most ways, acknowledged. This desire to keep menstruation secret is often paired with an attitude that menstruation is dirty and disgusting...Shame about menstruation is often extended to the vagina and its surrounding areas, which are considered by many women to be unspeakable and unpleasant" (Schooler 2005:324).

McKenzie (2017:190) and Rutherford (2016:290) both stipulate that affect is embedded within cultural, societal and power structures. Rutherford specifically mentions that affect can be used to form specific attitudes towards certain topics and people so that 'discourses of control and containment' are formed. Embarrassment, fear and disgust can be entrenched in discourses and thus be utilised as a means of suppression, erasure and silence. This results in the birth of 'taboo topics'. Four out of the eleven participants used the word 'taboo' to refer to the issues discussed in the

¹⁷ See chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives.

comic, such as female body hair, menstruation and female sexuality, without this word even once being mentioned to them by the researcher before or during the interviews. Another student stated, “There are always topics that you just don’t touch...” (S3-FAw).

Several participants made links to Rutherford’s concept of control and containment, with reference to the suppression of the corporeal feminine. Statements such as “That’s just society” (S2-FEw) or “That’s just how society is teaching us to be” (S7-MEb) show that these structures are so embedded within our cultural norms, that even though the participants are aware of these indoctrinating systems, they simply accept them with an attitude of ‘that’s just the way it is’. (S11-FEw) said that “I feel like there are a lot of things for girls especially...that we make weird. We make (menstruation) an uncomfortable topic”. In many cases, these power structures become quite invisible. (S5-FEw) made a connection to this, with reference to the famous feminist group, the Guerrilla Girls (Guerrilla Girls 2018), stating:

“...you go to a museum and you see nude women...you’re in awe of it. And all the artists are male, but you don’t really realise until someone says like...listen...why is this like this? You’re so used to the fact that there are male artists painting nude women. We are almost indoctrinated in a certain way and then suddenly when someone says it out loud...you’re like, oh, that’s weird. I like their work because they put stuff in your face that you don’t necessarily realise has been there the whole time” (S5-FEw).

The response of ‘shame-humiliation’ was the most prominent of all the negative affects that were noted during the interviews. The term ‘embarrassment’ was mentioned often, especially with connection to menstruation and symbols of female sexuality. As the comic book contained no words other than the chapter titles, the word ‘embarrass’ or ‘shame’ was not mentioned to the participants prior to the interviews. The words were also not included in any of the interview questions. Despite this, the word ‘embarrass’ or other grammatical variations thereof was visibly noted in the transcripts - fifteen times across different female participants’ responses. The word ‘ashamed’ was used twice by a male participant (S7-MEb), while the term ‘self-conscious’ was identified once (S5-FEw).

Furthermore, it is believed that laughter, humour, long pauses between responses and avoidance of specific words can also indicate embarrassment and can be used as coping-mechanisms during uncomfortable situations (Jackson & Falmagne 2013:389; Hay 1999:723-725). Words such as ‘stuff’, ‘thing’ or ‘it’, used in certain contexts, were used by participants during their responses towards the comic to avoid mentioning words such as ‘menstruation’, ‘womb’ or other words associated with female sexuality. This occurrence was especially strong in (S4-MAw)’s responses. When asked what immediate emotions come to mind while looking at the comic, he responded, “It’s a bit odd. It’s a bit of an adaptation, especially because I am a boy and it’s not stuff that we see every day. But there is a story to it that links and it deals with the things that bother people...like those ‘Free the Nipple’ things, which happen to women that they can’t

control". His interpretation of the first story was "...the first one is just about that the woman isn't afraid to show who she really is and what happens to her...and that it isn't something that she has to hide to the world because it's stuff that happens to all women". Both of these responses were specifically in response to the 'Blood is blood' comic, which deals with menstruation.

When (S5-FEw) viewed the comic titled 'Breaking Waves', she became quite embarrassed during her responses. She stated, "Okay, so this one is about birth...this one is weird (laughs). I don't really know how to feel about this one (laughs). Like here (Fig. 9), it's a cave, but obviously it's something else (laughs)...it's like the inside of a woman". She avoids mentioning the word 'womb' or vagina¹⁸.



Fig 9. Hunter, K. 2018. *Shapes of flow: Breaking waves*. Stellenbosch: Scaly Studios.

Furthermore, the participant also used the word 'taboo' three times throughout her responses to describe the female body and 'the things that women go through'. When asked why she believed it made her uncomfortable, she said, "...maybe because...I don't know...giving birth (laughs)...I don't know...I think it's because it's something we're not exposed to. Even though I am a woman and I might have children one day...it's still like...you don't really go through the whole process of giving birth and what it looks like and how it feels and so on until you get there" (S5-FEw).

(S3-AFw) expressed similar embarrassment towards menstruation when she was asked to interpret the story. When the character in the story is shown with menstrual

¹⁸ This image was specifically used as a link to the 'labial symbolic framework', with the aim of connecting the concept of reproduction to a context that serves as a female symbolic perspective and voice.

blood on her pants in Figure 10, the participant says, "...obviously she's had a (hushed voice) leak". Later she describes a personal experience, saying, "...if you are girl...you wonder the whole time like...if my period starts now...is anyone going to see? And do I have my stuff with me? You always have to be prepared, even if it's a week after you stopped. You always have it on your mind...you feel like everyone *knows*, but it's just in your head." This response once again references systems of containment and control. The participant expresses a clear need to constantly monitor herself for fear of stepping beyond culturally accepted boundaries, which will deem a 'leaky' woman as a 'disorder that threatens all order' (Grosz 1994:203). (S11-AFw) expressed a similar concern, saying, "I've never actually had that happen to me, but the fear is so real...it's just like, the biggest fear". To both participants, defiance of the system is linked to powerful negative affects of fear and anxiety.



Fig. 10. Hunter, K. 2018. *Shapes of flow: Blood is blood*. Stellenbosch: Scaly Studios.

From the responses in this section, it can be concluded that the female body and its flows are still tied to many negative associations. While third wave feminists, such as Kristeva and Irigaray, hoped to see women's corporeal state as a site for subverting patriarchal power structures, it is possible to see that there is still much hesitation to do so - despite the time that has passed since they voiced these wishes. However, to show that all hope has not yet been lost, the following section will explore the positive affect responses that were experienced by the study participants.

5.3.2. Impelling forces

Positive affect can be identified by means of impelling corporeal engagement (Best 2002:210), personal connection and sympathy. These three themes will be investigated in this section. They are based on the two positive manifestations of

affect, namely interest-excitement and enjoyment-joy (Probyn 2004:26). Bracha Ettinger's concept of *fascinace*¹⁹ will also be included as an impelling force of affect.

As a broad indication of attraction towards the comic, all the participants were asked whether they felt their response to the comic was mostly positive or negative. Seven participants responded that they definitely felt a positive reaction towards the comic. Three participants indicated that it was positive, but there seemed to be some hesitation. One participant answered, "Um, I don't know. I think it's very conflicting". She believed that this specific comic drew a positive reaction from her because "...it is an attractive way to present something that we don't normally present in an attractive way...I think it is very beautiful, and that's what makes it so good. It's easy on the eye". She indicated that if the comic were more extreme, her reaction may not have been as positive.

5.3.2.1. Corporeal engagement

The most visible form of affect is corporeal engagement, which is a literal bodily movement towards or away from an object. In the case of impelling corporeal engagement to a piece of artwork, the participant will move closer to the object, and may choose to physically feel it in order to stimulate their sense of touch (Best 2002:210). Although all of the participants were required to touch and hold the book during the study in order to page through it, three of the participants engaged with it much more than the others. As the book was covered in a layer of silicon, it had an interesting texture similar to skin. (S11-FEw) had a similar response. She indicated that she was specifically drawn towards the front cover of the book because of its texture. She continued, "It makes me connect with it. It's touch - that's a very important part of understanding yourself". (S1-FAw) immediately remarked on the texture, and was constantly stroking the book cover with her fingers. At both the beginning and the end of the interview she commented on this and remarked that it was suggestive of human skin. She stated, "I really like the way it feels. It kind of makes you feel...okay, we don't quite feel like this, but the feeling of it is nice". She also kept the book on her lap, and physically leaned into it on multiple occasions. Another participant, (S3-FAw), also leaned into it often, constantly examining it from up close. She stated, "I find all of these small details very interesting and I just want to keep looking at it". Both participants, when asked what their overall reaction to the artwork was, confidently said, 'very positive'. (S3-FAw) commented that her overall reaction was "...definitely very positive. Like I said, even just the cover, the texture of it...Everything to me is just very fascinating and it's the small things, like the cells you drew and her facial expressions...you can read the emotion immediately. The whole humour of it is very nice and I enjoy it very much to page through it". Her response is insightful and quite different to those of many of the other participants. Her reference to the 'cells' shows that she noticed the biological references within the images, which would in some

¹⁹ See chapter 2: Theoretical perspectives.

cases only be seen upon more careful observation or, in other words, deeper corporeal engagement.

5.3.2.2. Personal connection, empathy and *fascinance*

Personal connection, empathy and Ettinger's concept of *fascinance* all work together harmoniously, and will be analysed together below. I will begin with identifying some of the ways in which participants were able to personally connect to the comic book.

During the interviews, the participants were asked whether they could relate, or make a personal connection, to any of the images in the comic book. All of the female participants were able to confirm that they could relate to the stories, especially 'Blood is blood', "...just because I'm a girl" as (S8-FEw) stated. (S2-FEw) and (S11-FEw) said that the stories were 'very familiar' and 'relatable', even before the question was asked. (S2-FEw) reflected on her memories from school, when boys and girls were sent to separate assemblies so that the teachers could speak about menstruation to the students. When she mentioned this, it immediately evoked a memory from my own experiences of 'period assemblies' in primary school, and I felt very connected to her story.

The male participants could not necessarily relate to the physical experiences shown in the comic, but they made personal connections in other ways. (S7-MEb) reacted with empathy towards the character in the story. According to Carol Jeffers (2008:66-67), empathy is defined as the ability to emotionally and intellectually identify to someone (or something) else. She indicates that there are two branches of empathy, namely cognitive empathy, which is the ability to understand the emotions and thoughts of another person within specific circumstances, and *affective* empathy, which is when an individual experiences emotions in response to the situation of another living being. Empathy is also believed to stem from a biological process, in which the mirror neurons of the brain are stimulated to simulate the experiences of another. (S7-MEb) started the interview with jokes and a very light-hearted tone. After reading the comic, he became much more serious. He stated, "I wouldn't say I'm shook...it's just that I feel bad for her. I feel bad for girls, especially when they are on their periods and they are in a public place and they feel embarrassed. I feel bad for them...I sympathise." He went on to tell a story from his personal experience.

"I've had an incident where a girl was in class in my old school...she didn't know she was on her period and then she stood up, and the chair was...yah. Everyone was like 'oooh, oooh blood!' Everyone freaked out and obviously the boys were like 'ew, ew', because that's just how society is teaching us to be...so against period blood and stuff like that. I felt really bad for her, because she felt a lot and even the girls were like 'ew, ew'" (S7-MEb).

His response became even more serious when he was asked to identify themes that stood out to him in the comic. He said, "...it's like she feels alone even though there are people around her, so it's like herself versus all these people. They are judging her...she feels like she's trapped in her own body. I don't know how to put it in words. She feels so ashamed and she's trapped in the casket which is her body" (S7-MEb). The feelings of being 'trapped' and 'alone' were entirely his own interpretation of the

story, and shows that he placed himself into the character's imaginary situation in order to understand how he would feel, if he had experienced a similar occurrence personally. (S10-FEc) reacted similarly to the first comic. She responded that:

"It's weird to me, like the first story, how the people...especially the women...how they are speaking behind her back. But they go through the same thing...it's kind of a double-standard. And I think you come across this a lot, especially in schools. Girls can be so mean to each other...it makes me so sad. I like the idea of women empowerment, like, if you can make someone's day and just be nice to them, then why not? Instead of speaking behind their backs and being mean. I have experienced...when girls are mean to you for some or other reason, and it isn't nice".

In both the participants' responses, affective empathy was clear. (S10-FEc) connected the character's experience to her own, and was therefore able to understand the character's feelings without any words appearing in the story.

During the interviews, I also encountered what I believe to be two occurrences of Ettinger's concept of *fascinace*. *Fascinace* is an experience where two subjects are momentarily suspended in a co-poietic state, in which an affective experience of wit(h)nessing occurs.

Two participants shared intimate moments with myself as the researcher, where it was as though they were transported into their memory and momentarily forgot that another person was present. I absorbed the information they shared with me, as I was able to be transported into my own memory of my similar experience. In this case, I was wit(h)nessing their experiences in a state of *fascinace*.

(S3-FAw) was providing her interpretation of the comic 'Blood is blood'. When she viewed Figure 11, she stated, "She isn't feeling well, but she just has to get up now. (She) has a shower and then...like it's also always...it's sort of fascinating...you still can't really believe that it is coming out of your body...it's so weird. So I can just think, in her head, like where she is looking down here...it's also like a whirlpool..."



Fig 11. Hunter, K. 2018. *Shapes of flow: Blood is blood*. Stellenbosch: Scaly Studios.

I found this to be a very private and intimate experience for the participant and it was interesting that she chose to share it. She was of course reflecting on the drawing from my own similar private experience. When she realised that she was sharing this intimate thought, she stated, "It's probably weird" (S3-FAw). This could be connected

to *fascinum*, in which the co-poietic moment is broken and a slip back into the phallocentric order occurs.

(S5-FEw) shared her intimate experience in response to Figure 12, when she was asked which image she was drawn towards and why.



Fig 12. Hunter, K. 2018. *Shapes of flow: Free the Nip*. Stellenbosch: Scaly Studios.

She responded, “Um...I like this one where she undressed herself and then looks at herself in the mirror. I feel like that’s very personal and everyone does it. You look at yourself and you judge yourself. I mean, everyone looks at themselves in the mirror...maybe see what they like and what they don’t like” (S5-FEw). This comment drew me into memories of where I stood in front of a mirror going through the same process of judgement. Although the image was not originally intended to mean what the participant said, it has now taken on that meaning to me. This therefore became an affective moment towards myself as the researcher, in which the participant and I were momentarily joined in a very familiar, private moment in order to attach new meaning to an image. This reflects the co-poietic moment, in which two unfamiliar subjects are ‘borderlinked’ to generate new knowledge together.

In conclusion, the comic evoked both repelling and impelling affect responses. While most participants indicated that some form of embarrassment was felt, they were also eager to discuss the issues related to perceptions of the female body. Some participants, such as (S11-FEw) and (S7-MEb) acknowledged that they felt embarrassed, but voiced that they were confused about why they felt that feeling in the first place. They expressed that these topics should be included in conversation more often, so that these structures of shame can be challenged.

5.3.2.3. Awe and wonder: do we really understand our bodies?

The relationship between the body and the mind was explored in Chapter 2 (Theoretical Perspectives). It was concluded that an attempt should be made in the artwork to illustrate this relationship as a Mobius strip, rather than as a dualist pair.

The Mobius strip implies that the body and mind work together to form identity and make meaning, through a process of twisting and inversion, so that the body becomes the mind and the mind becomes the body (Grosz 1994: *xii*). Four participants, however, showed contradicting understandings of this perspective. They saw their bodies as an entity separate to their minds, which is ‘unknown’ and needs to be ‘figured out’ (S11-FEW).

(S3-FAw) voiced that “I don’t think I even know everything about my body yet...and it’s just crazy to me that...it’s your own body and still you don’t know about everything that’s going on”. Her statement is tied directly to the conflict arising in philosophical debates regarding the dualism of the body and the mind. (S1-FAw) and (S2-FEW) viewed the capabilities of their bodies as awe-inspiring. (S2-FEW) responded to Figure 13 by saying, “...everyone was laughing at her, pointing fingers at her like ‘oh look at that, that’s so embarrassing...’. She kind of just gave them a giant middle finger and was like ‘Actually, I’m going to put this on display with the rest of the artwork, ‘cause it’s basically amazing that my body can do this’”.



Fig 13. Hunter, K. 2018. *Shapes of flow: Blood is blood*. Stellenbosch: Scaly Studios.

When asked which image she was most drawn to, (S1-FAw) responded that she really liked Figure 14. She said this is because of the way the character “...is sitting and drawing it (the baby) and just admiring it. That’s very nice, and that’s what draws me...the wonder of creation, because to me it is one of the biggest miracles”.



Fig 14. Hunter, K. 2018. *Shapes of flow: Breaking waves*. Stellenbosch: Scaly Studios.

(S3-FAw) also responded to Figure 14, describing the process of pregnancy as a way to 'discover your body'. I found this point interesting because, when (S4-MAw) asked me what my own interpretation of 'Breaking Waves' was, a segment of my answer was "...it's the exploration of pregnancy. I haven't been pregnant...it's something that is still somewhat strange and unfamiliar to me, and she (the character) goes into this tunnel...she's like Indiana Jones with her little torch and she's going to explore the idea of pregnancy" (R-FAw).

Despite the wish to apply the Mobius strip concept to the mind-body relationship, there is clearly still a disconnection between the two entities. As a response to this, one could acknowledge that there certainly are bodily processes that cannot consciously be controlled. Societal views towards these uncontrollable processes, however, can be. Based on participant responses, affective empathy has served as a powerful element of disruption. Towards the end of (S7-MEb)'s interview, he said, "What the character is doing here (in 'Blood is blood')...she is sort of teaching everyone a lesson. Like 'I've got this, it's just who I am. You go through this. Anyone does'. So why should we be ashamed of it?" His empathic response lead to a voiced call for action.

In essence, while the 'uncontrollable' processes of the female body have been used as justification to dominate and suppress female sexuality, this sense of uncontrollability also inspires affective responses of interest, fascination and wonder. These responses can be channelled into social pathways as subversive tools.

5.3.3. Em(power)ment and equal difference

This section investigates the way in which participants viewed empowerment, equality and difference in relation to *Shapes of flow*.

5.3.3.1. Em(power)ment

As the research question indicates, the aim of this study was to obtain a better understanding of whether the participants found the comic book, *Shapes of flow*, empowering or not.

The interview transcripts were carefully examined for comments in which the participants referred to the comic as empowering. They were not specifically asked this question, and therefore this response was self-generated. Six participants (more than half of the total number), indicated that the comic made them feel empowered, or that they saw the work as empowering. (S3-FAw) said, specifically in response to the comic 'Free the Nip', "It's that feeling of, at the end of the day...I just have to rip it all off. I can't pretend anymore. You just have to take your bra off. But instead of this being the end of the day, it's the beginning of her day and she is going to go and conquer now". (S8-FEw) stated that her reaction to the comic was "...positive, most definitely. I think it's something that should be normalised and not shunned or not spoken about. And like, why can't you talk about it? And also just empowerment. I feel like...the female body is so sexualised. Why can't we just walk around? Or talk about periods? Girls are like (whispers) it's my period. They should be like (raises voice) IT'S MY PERIOD!"

Owing to the acknowledgement from so many participants that the comic could be viewed as empowering, I wished to gain a better understanding of how they believe empowerment is viewed and defined. When asked what empowerment means to (S8-FEw) during the group discussion, she answered, "I relate the word 'power' to 'bring forth'. Like you're putting something upon you...When I think of 'empower', it think it should be...empathetic. Not like *loud, boom*. It's should be like, we're helping you recognise this for yourself, so that you can take it upon yourself in your own way". (S9-FAw) said, "Empowerment...goes with making...to give us more self-confidence...I think power is influence. It goes to 'empowering', or influencing". (S5-FEw) responded that:

"...Empower is when you can stand up and say something and no one will look down at you...even if you say something incorrectly, people will still listen to you, take in what you're saying, disagree or agree. You shouldn't be afraid to do that just because you're a woman or whoever. You can stand up, say what you need to say, and there's not that whole thing like...ohhh I'm inferior or...that confidence thing. You can actually stand up for what you believe and if people agree or disagree it's fine. It has nothing

to do with your gender, the way you look or the way you dress. It's not like that, it's just what you're saying. It's your own knowledge" (S5-FEW).

The above statement was interesting, as it refers quite clearly to the silencing function that oppression has. The corporeal feminine has been suppressed and silenced throughout discourse for a long time, even in feminist discussions (Davis 1997:8). Therefore, while the comic may not necessarily be viewed as empowering from all feminist perspectives, it could serve as a space for the momentary disruption of marginalising forces, by introducing silenced topics into everyday discussions.

5.3.3.2. Equal difference

"All the women came together, regardless of shape, size, colour - everything...half the population is women. We can come together and really fight the system on that and say, '...you know what? No. We are tired of this shit, so we are going to force you to change it up a bit'. I don't think women realise how powerful they are" (S2-FEW).

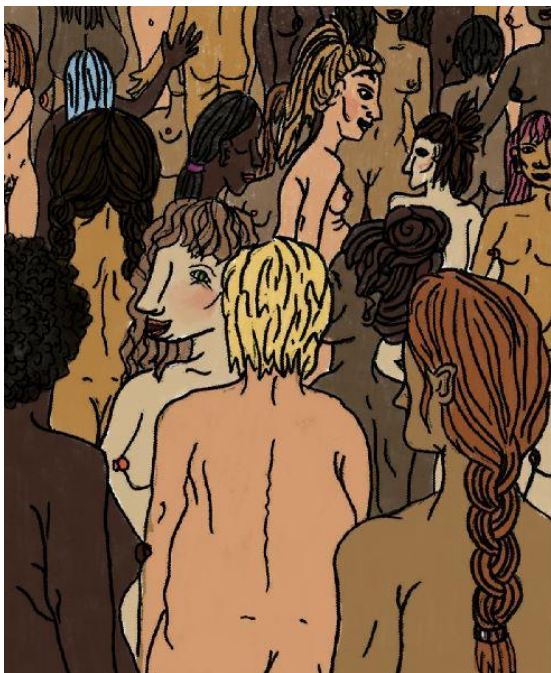


Fig 15. Hunter, K. 2018. *Shapes of flow: Breaking waves*. Stellenbosch: Scaly Studios.

As can be seen in the quote above, which was said as a reaction to Figure 15, there is hope that, despite their differences, women can join together, without inequality emerging, so that they can face the greater inequality as one. Similar responses were identified in two other participants' transcripts. (S1-FAw) referred to it as a freedom movement. She said "...to me (the comic) is empowering, because what's nice to see it that the people in the end are doing it together. It's a movement that's created...it's not just a 'I am an island' story. The people actually want to do it together".

In the group discussion, the participants were asked what their understanding of equality was, especially with the knowledge that there are differences between the lived realities of people. (S8-FEw) expressed an insightful metaphor to describe her view regarding this.

“I think it’s like heaven...everyone has this idea that they can get to heaven. Everyone’s striving to it but they don’t even have any idea whether there even is a heaven and, at the end of the day, there probably isn’t one - we have no idea. Everyone does what they think is best to get to heaven, but what they think is best could be infringing on someone else’s idea of what they think is best. People can hurt one another just because people are different. Not even just personality-wise, people have different ideas of what is good and what is appropriate. I don’t think you can ever get equality. If you say you want equality, then you say you want everyone’s minds to be equal and that’s not going to ever work” (S8-FEw).

It is challenging to reach a conclusion regarding this situation. The celebration of difference between people is a matter of significance, because the concept of claiming ‘sameness’ between the ‘subject’ and the supposed ‘other’ may result in simply making power relations invisible, rather than solving them. It was indicated that this has already occurred in feminist theory, when it was claimed that difference feminism leads to essentialism and marginalisation and the topic was therefore avoided. In turn, by placing too much emphasis on difference, marginalisation could also occur. To conclude, in the words of (S5-FEw), “I am different, but there are also people similar to me. I feel like that is special and it should be celebrated...not necessarily male and female - I mean, even if you just look at women, there are many different types of women. You get black women, white women, you get transgender women...there is such a big variety. There are different people, but there will always be someone kind of like you, and that makes a group. So I do feel like that can be celebrated”.

5.4. Personal Reflections: An interview with myself

Affect is a multi-dimensional concept. Each body has the ability to affect and be affected (Probyn 2004:37). This section functions as a space to capture a few personal reflections regarding the process of creating the corporeal feminist comic book, during and after the interviews were conducted.

5.4.1. Challenges

While making the comic, it was important to attempt to capture a multicultural perspective throughout the artwork. This was difficult, as the story only has two main characters. Secondary characters were woven into the story, so that this issue could be addressed. Furthermore, it was my hope to portray the story in a meaningful manner which positively addresses complex societal issues. I wished to maintain light-heartedness and humour. The main aim was to create an artwork that would lead to

women feeling empowered. This was not an easy process and still has potential for improvement (R-FEW).

5.4.2. Interesting responses from people during the comic creation process

When the comic was printed, there was some insecurity about whether the comic would be viewed as inappropriate in a public space. While handling the printed pages, the printing assistant commented that the comic book is ‘...quite graphic’. Another viewer also used the word ‘graphic’ to describe the artwork. This word was only used to describe the comic by people outside of the interview space. This leads one to wonder whether the data would have shown very different results, had the interviews been conducted with people who are not familiar with feminism. One woman, however, did view the comic from a perspective outside of the interview space. She reacted similarly to the other female participants. She was fascinated by the artwork and quite drawn into the story. When she viewed ‘Blood is blood’, she nodded in agreement. One could see that she was able to relate to it (R-FEW).

5.4.3. An informative experience

The research for this topic was very informative to me as the researcher. As I have no personal experience of pregnancy, I found that I was not as informed about the process as I believed - especially once I began to read about other women’s personal experiences. As was pointed out by (S5-FEW), the media has a significant influence on how women are viewed. Television portrays a very softened and sanitised version of women’s experiences of pregnancy and menstruation. Thus, this research was an enlightening experience, as it also led me to overcome my hesitation to discuss this topic. I believe that it is important for women to feel comfortable to discuss their bodies (R-FEW).

5.4.4. The missing pain

The pain of menstruation was almost completely omitted from the interview discussions. (S1-FAW), (S10-FAc) and (S11-FEW) sympathised with the character in the story’s pain, but none of the participants elaborated on the topic. (S11-FEW) had the most detailed response of the three students, saying “That’s very relatable. Just lying there like...pain, pain, pain”. The lack of discussion was somewhat unforeseen, as the painful experience of menstruation has, through time, become a main aspect to me, and has led to my perception towards the process becoming quite negative. As Grosz indicates, menstruation is sometimes associated with “...injury and the wound” (1994:205). Focussing on this does, however, dismiss menstruation’s powerful ability to result in new life. Perhaps this is a battle that some women fight by themselves, because all women do not experience menstrual cramps intensely (R-FEW).

5.4.5. The missing representation

Upon reflection, it became apparent to me that the comic lacks representation of the trans-gender community. It would be beneficial to include this perspective for future reference, so that the discussion can be opened up. None of the participants mentioned this lack of representation, which shows that a constructed idea of what a 'woman' is still exists. As was stated during my personal interview, "The comic book has its limitations. This is also because I am not a transgender person and have no personal experience with that. I felt that I couldn't truly and effectively and honestly represent this aspect. The comic was something that came from me and my personal experience. I wanted to see how people might react to it and whether they could attach their own meaning to it" (R-FEw).

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter has presented and discussed the findings of the research process as they relate to the concept of affect, corporeal feminism, empowerment and equality. Although *Shapes of Flow* induced some conscious and subconscious manifestations of embarrassment and suppression, I do feel that the overall view towards the study was very positive. The data indicated that there is an immense circulation of negative affect, such a repulsion and shame, connected to feminine corporeality, and especially towards menstruation.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and implications

6.1. Introduction

During my tertiary education, I increasingly began to see the potential of expanding the existing field of research on the topic of corporeal feminism. When I delved further into an investigation of this subject, it became clear that the topic was still being debated. Corporeal feminism is not always viewed as being empowering, especially as many aspects thereof are viewed as taboo subjects in a socio-cultural environment. According to my research, one of the contributing factors of why corporeal feminism is not generally linked to empowerment, is because it is connected to difference feminism, which is believed by some feminists to result in essentialism and homogenisation. Despite this, I believe corporeal feminism is impactful, especially in artwork. According to (S11-FEw), the corporeal feminist in the comic was effective. She states, “I haven’t really seen exploration of the body in this sense. It’s usually more...metaphorical in different objects, but shying away from the body...from like actually showing those things. I don’t think (those artworks) were as effective because, in a sense, if you shy away from it (the body) too much, you’re not addressing anything”.

In short, I wished to investigate affective responses towards a corporeal feminist comic book of my own creation, to gain a better understanding of whether the participants believe that this feminist perspective can serve as a tool to disrupt patriarchal systems. If feminism of the body can generate impelling affective responses, it can potentially contribute to disrupting existing power structures and in the process allow women to reclaim their symbolic representation and sexuality. While the responses collected in this research cannot be generalised on a large scale, the framework of the investigation can serve as to how corporeal feminism can be explored in future endeavours.

In terms of the methodology of the study, the data was collected by means of a qualitative case study, using a naturalistic research paradigm. The data was analysed by using inductive interpretation. Throughout the research process, a variety of strategies were employed to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the research.

The study took place at a Western Cape higher education institution, placing the study in a South African educational context. The participants were all first year Visual Communication students majoring in Illustration, and consisted of two men and nine women. The data was collected in the form of open-ended interviews, in response to a corporeal feminist comic book titled *Shapes of Flow*.

This specified context of the research was chosen to portray an in-depth understanding of ‘the particular’ (Domholdt 1993) of the participants’ affect responses towards corporeal feminism, especially to further research in this field within a South

African context. The institution that was involved was chosen owing to the nature of its curriculum, which includes fields of study such as illustration and feminism. I believe this was beneficial to the research, as it allowed the students to provide informed answers to the interview questions.

6.2. Findings and implications

It is believed that discussion of the corporeal feminine can sometimes be viewed as obscene, as sexually objectifying and disrespectful (Kent & Morreau 1985:44-45). Despite these viewpoints existing, the responses from the participants indicated that the comic presented to them was not viewed as such. (S6-FEw) stated, "...the representations cannot be taken offensively whatsoever in my opinion...if people are offended by it or freaked out by it then I think you're kind of one of those people who dismiss the woman body and the reproductive system".

Furthermore, I found that there still seems to be discomfort amongst women to discuss the body and issues relating to it. Each participant responded with embarrassment at some point while the discussions were taking place. Several of the participants recalled personal experiences in which they felt ashamed or embarrassed as a result of the natural functions of their bodies.

What was also interesting to note was that nearly all of the participants mentioned that they felt societal structures were to blame for these negative attitudes towards the female body. Some participants suggested that, in order to unravel these societal discourses, it would be necessary to make adjustments to the way in which education deals with such issues. (S4-MAw) said, "...it has to be removed from generations...you have to teach them like that". (S3-FAw) recalled an experience during her time in school, saying, "I remember...my one art teacher...if we had to speak about anything like this then she just immediately skipped the slides and said 'oh, no, no, no.' It's so weird to me that even someone that you look up to doesn't want to speak about it in front of other people. Then you feel like you should also just like... (becomes quiet)."

Lastly, when this study commenced, I was dubious of whether the comic book would be viewed as an empowering piece of work. I was quite surprised to find that the responses towards the work were overall very positive, and that more than half of the participants utilised the word 'empowering' to describe the comic without this word being suggested to them prior to or during the interviews. (S2-FEw) stated, "I think, the only negative reaction I might have is maybe frustration, because obviously the issues in here...I don't want them to exist. But that's not the comic book, that's just society. The overall comic...it makes me proud to be a woman, and it makes me feel...almost more connected to the world...it makes me feel very empowered..." Another participant, (S10-FAc) said, "I like female empowerment, and I feel like this illustrates that very well".

In essence, the data presented throughout this study shows that a corporeal feminist comic book has the ability to draw a variety of fascinating affective responses. While the responses present “mixed feelings” (S1-FAw) in some cases, I believe corporeal feminism still has much to contribute to philosophical enquiry. While these opinions present a small number of voices compared to the scale of women in the world, the suppression of the female body is a global issue which needs to be resolved.

6.3. Further research and concluding remarks

As was stated, this study is a qualitative enquiry into a very particular context. The study was also limited by time and funding, and could therefore not be an exhaustive investigation with a large number of participants. Further research needs to be conducted regarding South African feminism, and especially South African feminism as it relates to the body. Furthermore, I also strongly believe that the voices of the LGBTQ community need to be added to this field in order to extend understanding of what the female body entails. While I believe difference feminism added an interesting research perspective to this study, I am aware of the dangers that it may present as a homogenising force in gender studies.

As an artist, I believe that this study has provided the answers that I have spent much time seeking throughout my university career. I am positive that the knowledge acquired during my research journey will be highly beneficial towards work that I aim to create in the future. I hope that the participants were affected in such a way as to feel more open towards their bodies, as well as the bodies of others, so that the concerns discussed in this study can be brought to light and addressed.

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Addendum A: Consent Form



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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

An investigation of affect responses drawn from South African tertiary level visual communication students by means of illustrating the corporeal feminine through comic book art.

RESEARCHER: Katherine Hunter

SUPERVISOR: Elmarie Costandius ()

CO-SUPERVISOR: Neeske Alexander

DEPARTMENT: MA Visual Arts (Art Education)

ADDRESS: Stellenbosch, 7600

CONTACT NUMBER:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

Dear Student

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted for the Master's in Visual Arts (Art Education) course at the Stellenbosch University. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the researcher, should there be any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research entails and how you could be involved. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary** and you are free to decline to participate without consequences of any kind. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to participate. If you wish, any collected data will be destroyed.

What is this research study all about?

- *This study will be conducted on the Stellenbosch Academy of Design and Photography campus.*

- The main topic of discussion is **South African feminism**.
- Research will be completed with the aim of investigating 'affect responses' that are generated from taking a feminist stance through comic book art, particularly through representation of the symbolic female body. I hope to find out to which extent this artwork can serve the intended feminist purpose of celebration and disruption of unbalanced gender norms.
- Research will be collected by means of an interview or group discussion. Interviews will be anonymous. A recording device may be used for accurate documentation. The interview will take about 45-60 minutes to complete.
- The interview will take place in a space of your choice, in which you feel safe and comfortable.

Why have you been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate in this study, because your opinion is vital to my research. This study is informed by topics discussed within your visual communication course, which will allow for interesting, educated responses.

What will your responsibilities be?

Please answer all the questions as clearly and honestly as possible, as this will allow the researcher to portray your opinion accurately within the research. Please inform the researcher immediately, should you wish to withdraw from the study.

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

This study provides an open space of discussion that ties well into your university course. This will provide a good space for you to voice your opinion, as well as for you to contribute towards research that aims to question unbalanced gender norms related to the female body.

Are there in risks involved in your taking part in this research?

You may be asked some personal questions during the interview. If you experience any discomfort and wish to withdraw, please inform the researcher immediately. You are, at any time, allowed to refrain from answering questions that you are not comfortable with.

Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

You will not be paid to participate in this study, but there will be no costs involved for you if you do take part.

Confidentiality and rights of participants

All data collected during this study that can be related to you will be kept strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by referring to participants through the use of first name aliases, and all collected data will be safely stored on a password-protected drive. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development. You have right to receive a copy of the Information and Consent form.

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I agree to take part in a research study entitled: *An investigation into 'affect responses' generated from illustrating the corporeal feminine through comic book art.*

I declare that:

- I have read or had read to me this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to participate.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests.

Signed at (place) on (date) 2018.

.....
.....

Name of participant

Name of Legal Representative
(If applicable)

.....
Signature of participant
Representative

.....
Signature of Legal
(If applicable)

Declaration by investigator

I (*name*) declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
- I specified that participation in this study is voluntary and withdrawal of participation in the study may occur at any time.
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 2018.

.....
Signature of investigator